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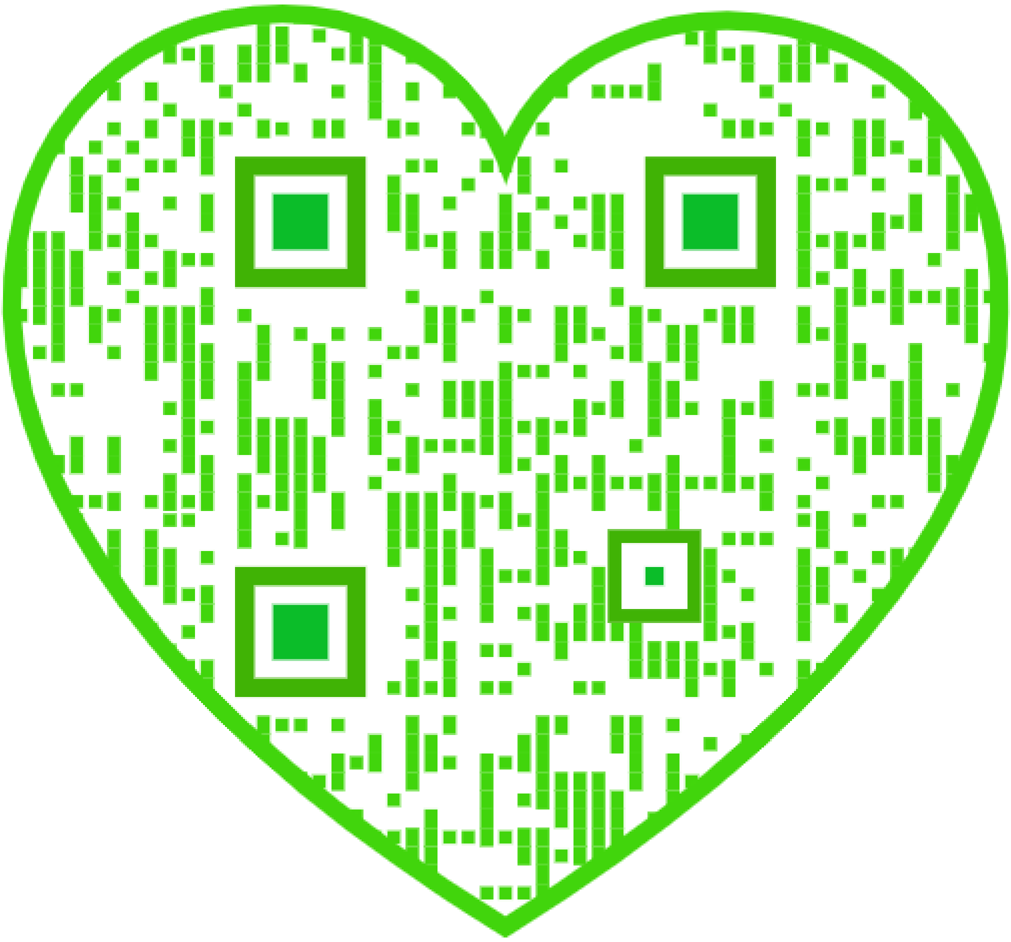
- SESSA C44
- ROBALO R257
- ALUMACRAFT COMPETITOR 205X SC

MARCH 2025
VOLUME 98 NUMBER 2



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BOATING
CLIMB ABOARD THIS YEAR'S ADVENTURE ISSUE
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ON THE COVER

The new Solara S-310 SC dayboat sets a new standard in layout, features, standards and price. Photo by Tom King

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) CRAIG KOTILINEK, COURTESY MERCURY MARINE, COURTESY SI-TEX / KODEN, COURTESY SHAKESPEARE MARINE, COURTESY MILWAUKEE TOOL, COURTESY STREAMLIGHT, COURTESY WEST MARINE

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The open water can be unpredictable, with unexpected storms, collisions, or other potential accidents. Boat insurance can give you financial protection if there is damage to your vessel, providing coverage for repairs or replacement.

Damage and injury

Accidents on the water can result in damage to other boats, docks, or even injuries to passengers. Boat insurance offers liability coverage, which can pay for damages or injuries you're liable for while boating, up to specified limits, and lawsuit costs if you're sued. This includes damage you cause to another watercraft or if someone on or near your boat is injured and you're found to be legally responsible.

Theft and vandalism

Unfortunately, boat theft and vandalism are realities that boat owners face. Boat insurance has comprehensive and collision coverage that can protect you against events outside of your control, including theft and vandalism.

Incurred medical payments

Accidents on the water may lead to injuries for you or your passengers. Boat insurance offers a range of optional medical payments coverage limits, helping to cover medical expenses if you are in an accident or someone is hurt on your boat, regardless of fault.

Peace of mind for financing

If you financed the purchase of your boat, most lenders require insurance coverage to protect their investment. Having boat insurance not only fulfills these requirements but also gives you peace of mind knowing that your financial interests are safeguarded.

Navigational flexibility

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By Kevin Falvey

POCKET CRUISING

Are cabin boats returning to favor?

For the past 12 or 15 years, open boats of all sorts have proved to be the darlings of the boat-buying public. Whether it's a center-console or a bowrider or a pontoon, boats with little or no sleeping capability currently rule the waves by a large margin. Sales stats, state boating-registration data, and the number of cabinless new-model boats hitting the market all bear this out.

It used to be different. When I started in the boat business in the 1980s, there were at least a dozen or more popular boatbuilders offering cabin boats. While some of these were certainly large convertible fishing boats and large cabin cruisers, plenty of makers offered smaller boats with cabins. I'll cite Grady-White's success with the walk-around cuddy cabin and Sea Ray's success with the Weekender line as two prominent examples (there are many more examples, spanning from Aquasport to Silverton, most of which are now no longer in business). These oft-called "pocket cruisers" were quite popular.

There were many reasons cited for the shift to open boats.

Owning a boat that you could sleep aboard allowed its owners more than just a night afloat, which is a great goal in itself, as far as I am concerned. It was also a sign of having "arrived" in the nautical sense. Trading in the skiff or bowrider for a cabin boat lent the owner a different status. It was more aspirational, to use a buzzword. As well, even buyers of smaller cabin boats might exploit the tax code and write off interest payments on Mom's Mink or Serenity. (Check with your accountant, please.) And a cabin-boat owner might go places that the open-boat owner would not: farther offshore, farther down the coast—and the stove, sanitation and porthole aisles of the marine supply store.

> Owning a boat that you could sleep aboard allowed its owners more than just a night afloat, which is a great goal in itself, as far as I am concerned.

RANDY AND RANDY
Don't miss Randy Vance's interview with bestselling novelist Randy Wayne White on page 19.

Myriad reasons exist for the shift to open boats. I'm in the camp who believes that cultural and societal forces changed the game. Many of us got busier in our work lives and so no longer had the time for those overnights and long weekends we used to take, but we could scoot out for the day, if not just for the afternoon. Also, more of us bought lake houses, or a place at the shore, perhaps diminishing the impetus to stay aboard overnight. With the requisite houseguests that are common with—and often the primary reason for—a boater purchasing a waterfront home, more of us needed boats that were not only rated to carry a crowd, but that also afforded all in that crowd a seat in the sun. Or at least a seat outside. All 10 people aboard a 25-foot pontoon or bowrider can all enjoy the view, have the wind in their hair, and sit with plenty of elbow room. But aboard even a larger cruiser, say 30 feet, some of those same 10 people need to ride belowdecks, or squish together in the cockpit lounges. Besides, who wants to take the family out in shifts, when often the same-size open boat can take everyone out at once?

Mind you, I am not claiming any of this is right, or universal to all boaters. These are simply the variables that I see as a result of traveling and boating on lakes, rivers, and the ocean all around the US—North America in general—and beyond, in addition to talking and corresponding with various boaters on a constant basis.

What I can claim is to give you a glimpse of a type of boating, aboard a type of boat, that was much more common. Check out page 78 for Craig Kotilinek's feature describing the pros and cons of weekending aboard a Beneteau pocket cruiser.

Kevin Falvey, Editor-in-Chief
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ON BOARD WITH

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Randy Wayne White Author

New York Times bestselling author Randy Wayne White has written more than 40 novels, but he's best known for his "Doc Ford" series, set on Sanibel Island, Florida. Doc Ford is a biologist with a "certain set of skills." White's latest novel, *One Deadly Eye*, is set during Hurricane Ian in 2022, and because White hunkered down for the blow, he gives a terrifying bird's-eye view of the destructive winds, storm surge and worse—the seedy looters and assassins who wormed their way into the devastated zone. I met up with White at a book signing at Sandman Books in Punta Gorda, Florida. —*Randy Vance*

Your main character, Doc Ford, is clearly a skilled boater. You must certainly be a boater yourself.
I got my ocean operator's unlimited license in 1974. I worked as a licensed fishing guide in the Sanibel area until my home port closed in 1989.

And that's when you began writing in earnest?
Yes. I had boys to raise and feed, so I wrote thrillers under a pseudonym—"duck and f-cks," we'd call them. My big break was when I began writing for *Outside* magazine.

What's your current boat?
It's a 25 Dorado with a half-bridge; I really like it. I added Doc Ford stencils to it.

What is your favorite boat?
I had a number of Shamrocks. Beautiful boats! But God almighty, they run like a John Deere tractor in the rain.

What boat do you wish you still had?
The Maverick 21 Master Angler. A magic boat. I just loved it.

What's your favorite bit of new boating tech that was unavailable when you began in '74?
The Power-Pole! My God, don't you wish you had invented that?

How many people ask if you're a spy?
It happens all the time, but when agencies start hiring people like me, we're all in trouble.

PHOTO: COURTESY RANDY WAYNE WHITE

HYDRAULIC STEERING SYSTEMS

Your boat's steering system is one of the most critical systems on the boat; a steering malfunction could cause a major accident, even death. Now that you're sufficiently scared, let's test your basic hydraulic-steering-system knowledge. —*John Tiger* (Answers below)

1. What is the best type of steering system for a typical single-outboard-powered hull capable of speeds in the 60-plus mph range?

A. Single push-pull mechanical cable system
B. Dual-cable mechanical system
C. Dual-cable "no feedback" mechanical system
D. High-performance hydraulic system
E. Any of the above will work fine.

2. What should you do to a hydraulic steering system every time you take a ride in your boat?

A. Nothing; it will work fine without maintenance or checking.
B. Drain all hydraulic fluid and refill with fresh.
C. Steer the system lock-to-lock to check for loose steering or binding, and to ensure that the engine/drive moves properly when you move the steering wheel.
D. Check the system and its parts for corrosion and fluid leaks.
E. C and D
F. All of the above

3. What should you do to any steering system as part of annual maintenance?

A. Hydraulic steering systems are maintenance-free.
B. Lubricate any grease fittings. While the system components typically do not have any grease fittings, the outboard usually has at least three: one or two on the swivel bracket, and two on the tilt tube.
C. Drain all hydraulic fluid and replace.
D. Check for leaking hydraulic fluid, leaking fittings, corrosion or binding; top off fluid; and bleed any excess air.
E. Replace any leaking seals—for example, at the engine cylinder, the end seals often leak.
F. B, D and E

4. Can you "overpower" your boat's steering system—that is, install an outboard with too much horsepower and torque for your boat's steering system to handle?

A. No. All hydraulic and cable systems are rated for unlimited power.
B. Yes. Some less-expensive systems (BayStar, for example) have horsepower and speed limitations.
C. Yes. Some systems are clearly rated—for example, 150 hp maximum and 55 mph maximum speed.
D. Yes. You cannot exceed 300 hp with any hydraulic steering system, no matter the manufacturer.
E. B and C
F. None of the above

5. You just finished installing a new hydraulic steering system in your boat. But when you turn the steering wheel to starboard, the engine turns to port. What could be wrong?

A. Nothing. It's correct.
B. You have the hose connections reversed at the helm or at the engine cylinder.
C. The engine is assembled incorrectly.
D. The steering system is wrong for the boat.
E. None of the above

6. When filling the system, the manufacturer recommends hydraulic-steering fluid. Of course, it's terribly expensive. Can't you just use outboard gear lubricant or automatic-transmission fluid?

A. Any hydraulic fluid will work just fine—fill it!
B. Use gear lubricant, the same as your engine's gear case.
C. Use only hydraulic fluid meant for boat hydraulic steering systems, as labeled.
D. A and C
E. None of the above

CAPTAIN'S TEST ANSWERS

(Answers from above)

1. D. A high-performance system meant for high-horsepower high-speed boats gives the best combination of feel, ease of steering, and control.

2. E. Steer the system lock-to-lock, checking for looseness, "skipping," obstructions, binding, and fluid leaks.

3. F.

4. E. All systems sold today specify the application, and many have speed and power limitations clearly noted.

5. B. The boat should turn to port when the steering wheel is turned to the left, and to starboard when the steering wheel is turned to the right. If it turns the other way, you have the hoses crossed.

6. C. Hydraulic fluid meant for marine hydraulic steering systems is the only fluid to use.

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INSIDE THE ISSUE

JETSKI RESCUE

A COUPLE FLAILING OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Karl Anderson is a longtime marine journalist and recipient of the IGFA's Tommy Gifford Award, which recognizes captains who have made extraordinary contributions to the advancement of sport fishing. Hear his story on how he helped save this couple. Tune in to Tales from Channel 16, presented by Icom, for another season of life-saving decisions and high-seas drama.

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HANDHELD LIGHTS

No matter how many lights you have hard-wired into your boat, every boater would be well-served to carry aboard some type of handheld illumination device. You never know when you're going to need to navigate through a bunch of moored sailboats at the marina after dark, or find that loose wire connector in the bilge. Here are three types of handheld lights to consider. —*Pete McDonald*

SPOTLIGHT

WEST MARINE

HEAVY WATERPROOF RECHARGEABLE LED SPOTLIGHT

THE BRIGHT SIDE: A spotlight's concentrated beam is great for picking out buoys at a distance. A handheld, such as this one from West Marine, does the trick. Its rugged aluminum case has an IP67 waterproof rating and floats. Its three settings harness 10,000 lumens. Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries provide three hours of use at full power, six hours at low power.

THE DARK SIDE: It takes six to eight hours to fully recharge and is not the best choice for lighting up the deck or poking around in the bilge.

PRICE: $174.99; westmarine.com

FLASHLIGHT

STREAMLIGHT

PROTAC HL 6

THE BRIGHT SIDE: A must-have for making repairs in a dark bilge, the Streamlight ProTac HL 6 can also help spot navaids or pick out a slip number on a dark dock, but not as well as a spotlight. The LED lights are powered by rechargeable lithium-ion batteries and can create a beam that extends over 1,857 feet on its highest setting (5,800 lumens). Cased in aircraft-grade aluminum, it can handle being dropped on deck, and has an IPX7 waterproof rating.

THE DARK SIDE: The beam is narrower than a spotlight's, so it won't provide the full scope of your surroundings.

PRICE: $265.38; streamlight.com

FLOODLIGHT

MILWAUKEE

M18 ROVER DUAL POWER FLOODLIGHT

THE BRIGHT SIDE: Floodlights cast a wide beam but not necessarily over a great distance. They are great to light up an area close to the boat, such as for landing a fish or as a help in docking. The handheld Milwaukee M18 Rover has both lithium-ion batteries and an AC adapter so that you can plug it into a 120-volt system. It provides up to 4,000 lumens and can run for three to 12 hours. It can be rotated 120 degrees, and the durable case features keyholes, so you can hang it overhead.

THE DARK SIDE: Its IP54 rating is water-resistant, not waterproof.

PRICE: $149; milwaukeetool.com

ONLINE THIS MONTH

INTO THE WILD

March is adventure month, so what better time than to read up on six boats designed for nautical nomads? Go to boatingmag.com/boats/boat-built-for-adventure.

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60th Anniversary

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By Kevin Falvey

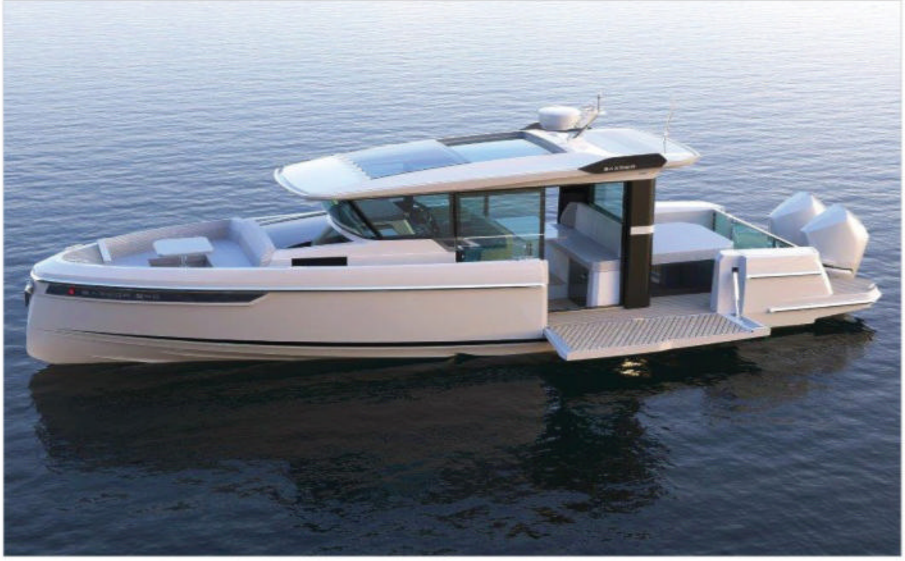

PHOTO: COURTESY SAXDOR YACHTS

SAXDOR
340 GTWA

Saxdor Yachts (again) proves itself influential, this time with the 340 GTWA, which debuted at the Cannes Yachting Festival this past September. The 340 GTWA combines a cabin boat with an open boat to serve both dayboating and cruising owners.

Topside, you'll find a walk-around pilothouse that not only provides easy access bow to stern for shipboard chores such as anchoring and docking, but it also gives those aboard more room to mix, mingle and, if they choose, find a spot away from the crowd and still be outside. The twin terraces that fold out port and starboard exponentially increase the deck space, and thus the sociability that the 340 GTWA provides. The pilothouse opens wide to the outdoors, further advancing this boat's dayboat mission.

For cruising, the cabin closes up (while retaining expansive views) to afford climate-controlled comfort for a family or two couples. The large deckhouse offers dining and lounging, and also houses the helm station. Belowdecks, two staterooms and a head with shower await. Throughout, fixtures and décor bespeak luxury.

Twin 400 to 600 outboards drive the twin-stepped hull. The price in the US is expected to be in the mid-$400,000 range.

- **LOA:** 35'5" - **BEAM:** 10'2" - **DISPLACEMENT (APPROX.):** NA
- **FUEL CAPACITY:** 113 gal.

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FIRST IMPRESSION

By Kevin Falvey

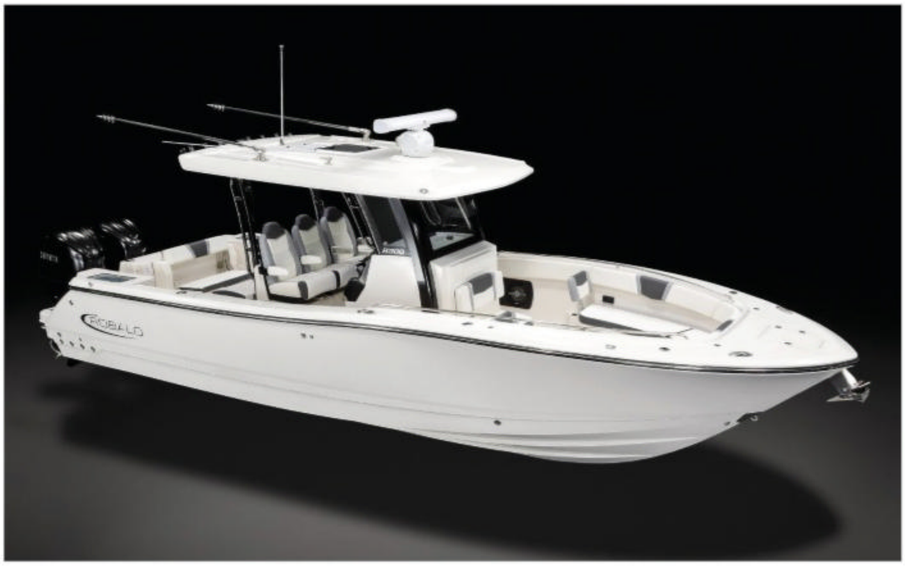

PHOTO: COURTESY ROBALO BOATS

ROBALO

R300

Robalo's R300 promises fishability, cruising comforts, and great performance.

Drawn by noted designer Michael Peters, the R300's deep-V hull features two running strakes per side, an aggressively raked stem, and other characteristics known for delivering confidence on open water.

Inside, we find a triple helm stand, with each of the three seats boasting a flip bolster, armrests and multicolor upholstery. Abaft, this is a triple-wide bench, affording aft-facing seating while also concealing a huge cooler underneath. An oversize hardtop is above and inside the center console; you'll find a spacious head compartment with plenty of headroom. There's a transom bench that folds away to clear the cockpit, with even more seating in the bow, where a stowable table and stowable backrests provide versatility and comfort.

The side cockpit door facilitates landing a trophy, swimming, or simply boarding from a floating dock. The level of fit-and-finish appears high, and we are anxious to get this boat out on the water to verify that and more. Starting at $247,995 (nationally advertised price), the outboard-powered Robalo R300 is rated for up to 700 hp.

▪ **LOA:** 30'6" ▪ **BEAM:** 10'6" ▪ **DISPLACEMENT (APPROX.):** 9,900 lb.
▪ **FUEL CAPACITY:** 280 gal.

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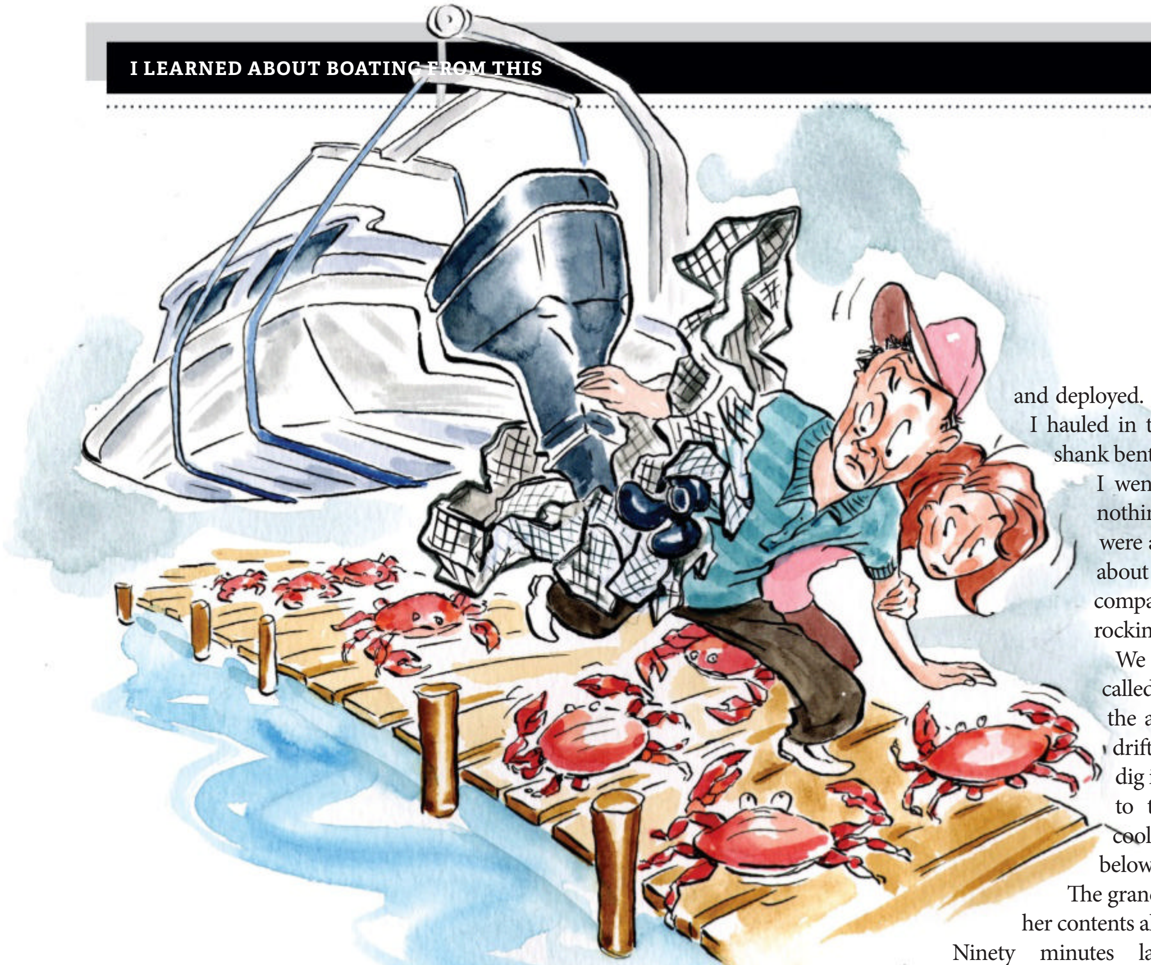

A CALAMITOUS DAY ON THE BAY

Ignoring a warning sign put this boater's crew in peril.

It was a beautiful August afternoon in Maryland, and my fiancée, her granddaughter, and I decided to take my 28-foot cabin cruiser down the South River and out into the Chesapeake Bay to the picturesque Thomas Point lighthouse, 5 miles from the marina. Once there, we decided to visit Annapolis, about 7 miles farther across open water dotted with crab traps. We went down Ego Alley and meandered through nearby Back Creek before heading home. I had noticed the voltmeter reading low and slowly dropping, but I pushed on.

> Suddenly, the boat jerked and veered hard to starboard. I looked around and saw the anchor line leading behind our boat, pulling a crab-pot float.

The seas had picked up to about 2 feet on our bow, making for a rough ride. Suddenly, the boat jerked and veered hard to starboard. I looked around and saw the anchor line leading behind our boat, pulling a crab-pot float (more on this later). The anchor had jumped off its hook and deployed. We stopped the boat, and I hauled in the anchor, which had its shank bent 45 degrees.

I went to restart the boat and nothing. Both banks of batteries were apparently dead. I thought about checking the engine compartment, but the boat was rocking a lot.

We donned life jackets, and I called TowBoatUS. I deployed the anchor again, but we kept drifting because it would not dig in. We were lying sideways to the 2-foot seas, and the cooler and refrigerator down below upchucked their contents. The granddaughter also upchucked her contents all over the cockpit.

Ninety minutes later, Capt. Greg with TowBoatUS showed up and towed us safely back to our marina.

We made it in before dark. Upon raising the boat on its lift, I noticed that there was a metal crab pot firmly wrapped around the prop. So, we would not have been able to make it home, even if I had found and fixed the loose battery connections that had prevented the motor from restarting.

What we did right: donning life jackets, keeping calm, deploying the anchor to slow our drift, and having three working cellphones and a handheld VHF. Had I gone into the engine compartment to troubleshoot, I could have been injured with the severe rocking.

What we did wrong: not fully checking everything before leaving the boat slip, not stopping in Back Creek to check the voltage drop, and not staying clear of the crab-pot area. I have since installed locknuts on the battery connections to keep them secure and tight.

Jim Anderson
Davidsonville, Maryland

ILLUSTRATION: TIM BOWER

WANTED: YOUR STORIES Share your boating mistakes and mishaps so that your fellow boaters might learn from your experience. Send us your first-person accounts—including what went wrong, what you'd do differently, your name and your city—to editor@boatingmag.com, and use "ILAB" in the subject line. If your experience is selected, we'll send you a $100 West Marine gift card.

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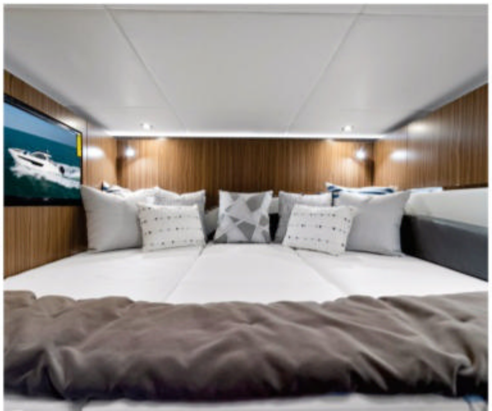

By Pete McDonald

INTO THE UNKNOWN

How to safely navigate unfamiliar waters.

Early on in my boat-testing career, I learned the hard way about what can happen when boating in unfamiliar waters. The boat company set up our test out of a beautiful Southwest Florida resort adjacent to Pine Island Sound. As I boarded the shiny new 30-foot cruiser and set to throw the lines, I asked the company rep where we should go to run the boat.

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm from Wisconsin."

A dockhand happened to overhear and said that whatever we do, don't veer outside the marked channels. So we idled out and then started collecting performance data between the safety of the red and green channel markers. All went well until we started running at speed in a stretch of water where the channel markers seemed at least a half-mile apart. I decided to try a hard-over turn at speed—standard testing procedure—and wandered outside the designated channel by about 20 feet. Sure enough, we both heard and felt the *whump* of the bow slamming into soft sand, then the boat stopped moving. What was supposed to be a two-hour boat test turned into a six-hour one as we waited for the tide to rise.

Lesson learned.

When boating in unfamiliar waters, there are steps you can take to ensure that you don't wind up high and dry—or worse.

SEEK OUT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE Unlike that boat test decades ago, a GPS and chart plotter now come standard on all but the simplest of boats. Make sure to update chart-plotter software to include whatever new waters you might be visiting, and also purchase a paper chart as a backup. But before you launch, ask around at the local docks and seek out people who regularly boat in the area. They will be able to share information about shifting sandbars, recent unmarked hazards, and quirky navigation tricks that might not be obvious. For instance, the spot where I ran aground gave away no telltale signs of being shallow, such as a color change, current seam or standing birds. To the naked eye, the water in the area looked exactly the same. We should have listened to the dockhand.

Another great resource is the Coast Guard's Local Notices to Mariners, which can be found under the "LNMs" tab on its Navigation Center site (navcen.uscg.gov). From there you can select a region and find out if a buoy or nav beacon is down, if a sandbar has shifted at an inlet, etc.

READ THE WATER It's not always the case, but often your surrounding environment will provide clues as to what's happening around you. Breaking waves in an inlet typically indicate a depth change and should be avoided. A drastic color change in the water can also reveal a spot where deeper water transitions to shallow. More-concentrated wind dimples can be a telltale sign of a depth change or a submerged hazard. Trust your senses; if something looks slightly off, it probably is.

STAY THE COURSE You might think you're safe just by monitoring your electronics and following the course laid out for you onscreen. But be sure to account for how wind and current affect your boat as you navigate. A crosswind or current can push you astray, even when you think you're tracking true. And as we found out that fateful day, in some areas, straying even a few feet outside the channel can be the difference between safely reaching port and being hopelessly stranded.

PHOTO: PARILOV / ADOBE STOCK

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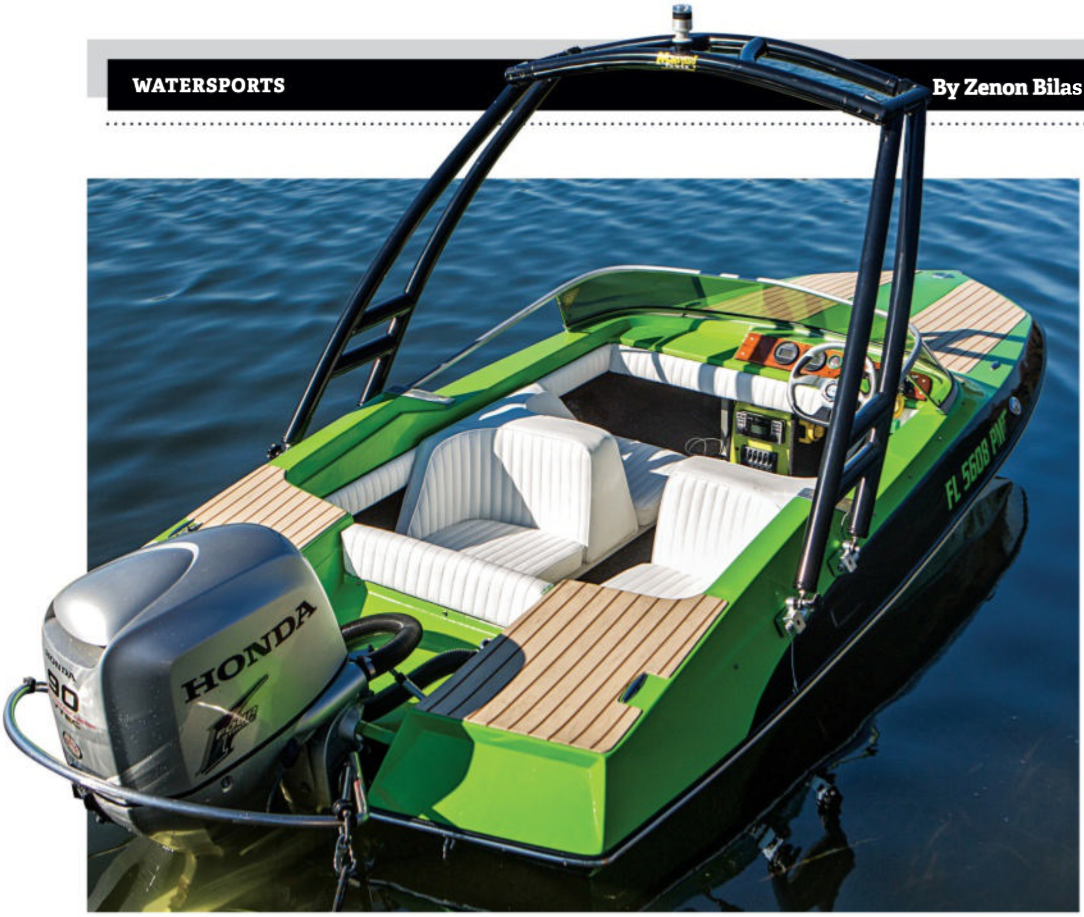
By Zenon Bilas



TOW POINTS Which type of towing rig is the best one for your boat? It all depends on what type of watersport you plan to pursue.

HIGH VS. LOW TOW

A guide to tow points for water-skiing and wakesports.

The right tow point—a water-ski pylon or a wakeboard tower—transforms your boat for watersports. With this addition, it's not just about the experience in the boat; it's about what you can do behind it.

For the first few decades after Ralph Samuelson invented water-skiing in summer 1922, skiers used a lifting ring near the stern of an inboard-powered boat to attach a tow rope. Since the late 1950s, competition ski boats have included a pylon placed just forward of their midship-mounted inboard engine. This pylon placement helps the driver maintain straight tracking of the ski boat, providing skiers with an optimal tow. Today's boats have many choices, catering to whichever sport you're pursuing.

PLETHORA OF TOW POINTS

Most runabouts, pontoons, saltwater fishing boats, and even 40-plus-foot dayboats like those made by Axopar, Beneteau, and Wellcraft offer a dedicated tow-point option. Wakeboard towers, which originated in dedicated wakeboard boats in the late 1990s, are now a common option for bowriders and pontoons.

Sterndrive and sport-jet boats typically feature a center-mounted tow eye at the transom, while outboard-powered boats can use a V-shaped tow harness or the TurboSwing—a curved stainless-steel bar with a swiveling tow point that keeps the ski line clear of the propeller.

Some manufacturers, such as Sea Ray, Bayliner and Boston Whaler, offer tow pylons but recommend using a transom tow point because it offers the most strength for towing the added drag of a tube. The lower tow point is crucial for tubing to inhibit it from going airborne or flipping.

AN UPWARD TOW

Low tow points are great for tubing but not for tow sports because they produce a downward pull, making it harder for skiers and boarders to maneuver. Pylons, TurboSwings, and towers provide upward pull, making it easier to start and perform tricks on wakeboards, kneeboards, and water skis. The higher the tow point, the better the lift—a must for sports such as wakeboarding.

The wakeboard tower provides a much higher tow point than a pylon, enabling wakeboard riders to gain more height and distance during wake jumps. This elevated pull also benefits water-skiers, kneeboard riders, and barefoot water-skiers by making in-water starts, slalom skiing, and performing tricks easier.

Not every boat can fit a tower, but some builders, including Sea Ray and Boston Whaler, incorporate tow points on hardtops. What about surfing? Some boats, such as the Regal 38 Surf, feature tow points not only at the traditional center location on the hardtop, but also on the starboard and port sides. This design allows water-skiers and wakeboarders to use the center tow point, while the side-mounted tow points make it easier for wakesurfers to get out of the water and manage the large wake created behind the boat.

CLEAT AND DESIST

It is important to note that you should take care in using the boat's cleat for towing. Too often, cleats are not installed with the force of someone cutting back and forth behind the boat or a tube that submarines in mind.

PHOTO: (FROM TOP) RANDY VANCE, COURTESY WEST MARINE

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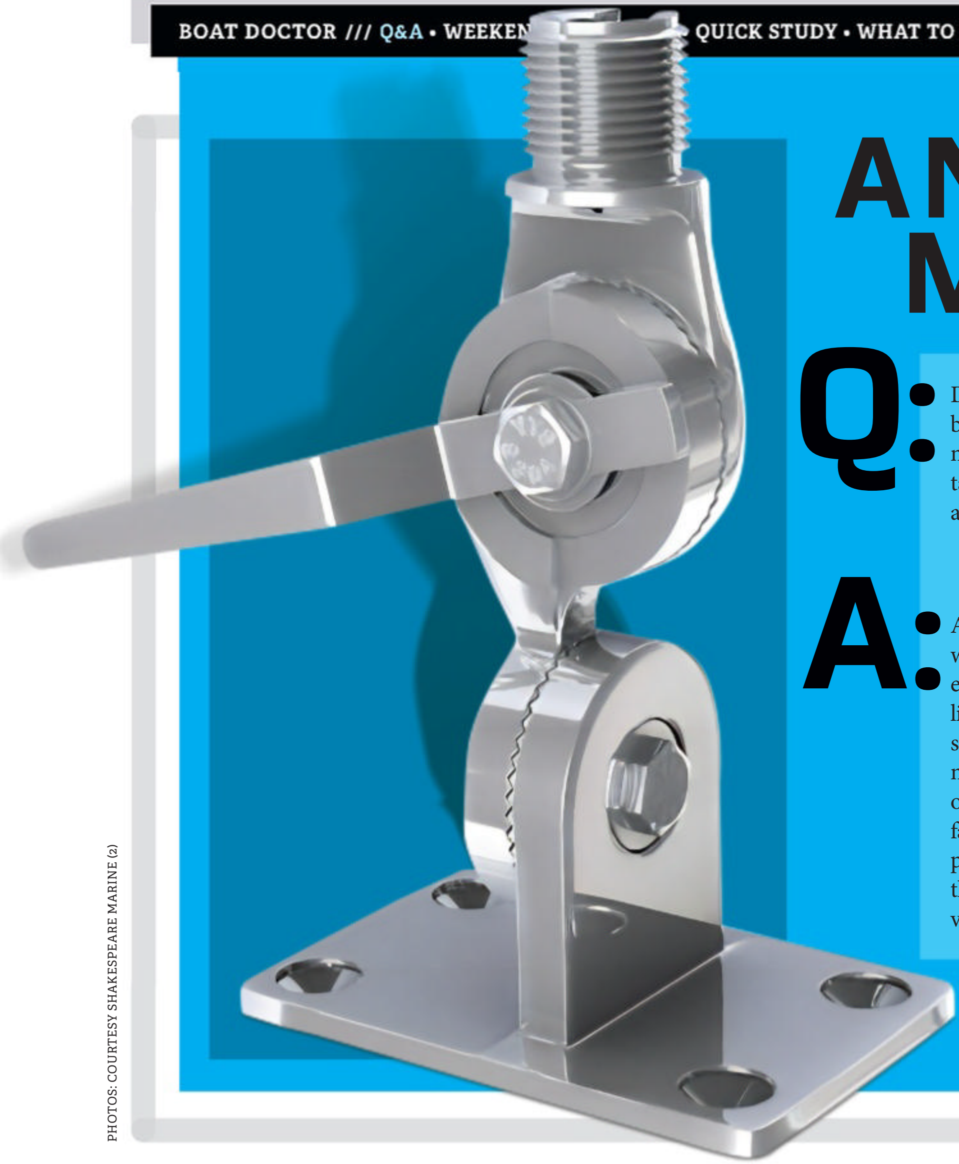
Q&A

By
Michael "Mick"
Hannock

LIFT AND LAY?
Do lift-and-lay antenna mounts make sense for your boat? Check out the pluses and minuses in the answer to the question below.



PHOTOS: COURTESY SHAKESPEARE MARINE (2)

ANTENNA MOUNTS

Q: Dear Boat Doc, I am installing a VHF radio on a brand-new hardtop that I just had fabricated for my family's Grady-White. What is the advantage or disadvantage of a "lift-and-lay" type of antenna mount versus a ratcheting mount?

Robert Sutter
Hampton Bays, New York

A: A lift-and-lay mount presents a lower profile when the antenna is lowered. It also might be less expensive than a ratcheting mount. Of course, lift-and-lay mounts come in plastic only, not in stainless steel like ratchet mounts. So, a ratchet mount might be better suited to larger antennas, or antennas subject to greater loads (such as fast boats or boats on rough water). Finally, and perhaps obviously, a ratchet mount allows angling the antenna somewhere between horizontal and vertical, if desired.

HEAT GUN FOR STIFF CANVAS Canvas contracts in the cold. The results of such shrinkage vary from not being able to connect a couple of snaps to the inability to snap or zip a cover or curtain at all.

Last month, we addressed this issue by suggesting snap extenders (available at marine supply stores). These allow you to fasten the canvas with more gap than might be preferable, but at least it's secured on the boat for the time being. The canvas might fit correctly again once temps warm up, allowing the extension to be removed.

Another solution is to make as many snaps as you can and then let the boat sit. Doing so allows the canvas to stretch a bit. Come back in a few hours, a day or three, and you might be able to make all the snaps.

If you don't have time to wait for canvas to stretch on its own or to shop for snap extenders, there is a third option: a heat gun or blow dryer. Careful application of warm—not hot—air on your boat's canvas might expand it enough so that all snaps and can be snapped and all zippers can be zipped. —*Kevin Falvey*

PROPER PROP INSTALL

Q: Is it OK to just put the engine in gear to prevent the prop from turning when I want to install my propeller, or should I use a block of wood to prevent the prop from spinning when tightening the nut?

Alex Burroughs
Manchester, New Hampshire

A: Use a block of wood.

WHICH BRUSH?

Q: Boat Doctor, should I be using a stiff, medium or soft brush to clean my boat?

Steven Milton
Via email

A: It depends. A stiff brush is great for nonskid surfaces but might not prove effective on smooth gelcoat, and it might scratch clear canvas curtains or plastic windshields and doors. A stiff brush also works well for clearing light fouling from the waterline or from the gear case of a sterndrive or outboard stored in the water.

A medium brush also should never be used on clear canvas, but it does a good job all around, though if you need to get tough grime out of nonskid, it's not the best choice.

A soft brush may be used with care on clear canvas, though I prefer a sponge or soft cloth. Soft brushes are also great for plastic and glass windshields, and any smooth surface where fine grime such as diesel exhaust has settled. For more on this, check out our story on boat brushes at boatingmag.com/story/gear/what-to-look-for-boat-brushes.

WE
TEST
STUFF

THE JAMES BRAND ELLIS AND HALIFAX

Stylish and expertly crafted, this pocketable multitool combo is as versatile as it is sleek.

Boaters can find many uses for a multitool both on and off the water. Great examples are the Ellis and Halifax from James Brand. We think this pairing is great for boaters.

The Ellis is James Brand's first knife offering with scissors, which anglers will appreciate for cutting braided fishing line. The slim, 3.5-inch-long Ellis manages to pack in a 2.6-inch partially serrated drop-point blade (or opt for a flat blade) made of Sandvik steel. It feels solid in hand and is up to many tasks. The craftsmanship is top-notch, and even small details go a long way. The trapezoidal end loop allows you to tie on a lanyard—a good idea for boat use, but it also acts as a flat-head screwdriver, a scraper, and a prying tool. Don't worry about bending or breaking it—the clip is as solid as the rest of the knife.

Pair the Ellis with the just-as-versatile Halifax to create a compact pocket-tool kit. The Halifax doesn't look like much at first glance, but upon inspection, you'll learn its many uses. At just under 3 inches long, the Halifax is also slim, easily attaching to a key chain and readily stored in your pocket. Billeted construction with PVD-coated stainless steel ensures strength. And when it comes to tasks, you can use the Halifax for driving screws (the design fits both flat-head and Phillips), prying, scraping, bottle opening and more. The ambidextrous Halifax comes with a titanium ring, so you can add it to your keys, attach a lanyard or hang it on a hook near the helm.

If you're a fan of carrying a knife but don't need the bulk or complication of a larger multitool, consider carrying the combination of the Ellis and Halifax. Of course, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better-looking combo out there. I've kept both in my pocket for a while now, and the stylish duo continues to impress me with their style and utility.

Ellis (as tested) $129; Halifax (as tested) $49; thejamesbrand.com —*Garrett Cortese*

LIVEWELL SCREEN

Q: Dear Doctor, I am going to install a livewell aboard my boat before the upcoming season. Do you recommend a filter for the livewell on the intake hose, or can I just use a grate on the outside of the hull? Both? Thanks.

Dale Benson
Atlantic City, New Jersey

A: I like to install a grate on the outside of the hull. In addition to helping prevent debris from entering your system, these serve as a scoop, ensuring that your livewell stays primed at planing speed. If your area is especially prone to weed and debris getting sucked up, you can add a strainer inside the boat. Being inside, it can be cleared while the boat is in the water. I would go with the scoop strainer first. If you find that you have a debris problem, you can always add an inline strainer later.

One more thing: The intake scoop strainer will throw a bubble trail. Do not install it directly in front of a transducer, lest those bubbles degrade the signal for your fish finder.

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY THE JAMES BRAND, COURTESY GROCO

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TANGLED LINE

Q: Dear Doc, we had a windlass installed on our boat last year. We love the ease of bringing up the anchor that it provides us. However, we've noticed that our anchor line is frequently tangled now. Can you offer a solution? Thanks.

Emma and Steve Ohrbach
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

A: Twisted, or "hockled," anchor line is a common malady caused by using a windlass. The solution is to use a swivel between the chain and the anchor. This allows the twist to work itself out of the line as the anchor is coming up. Visit your boat dealer or marine supplier, and ask for a swivel shackle or anchor swivel.

BATTERIES

Q: Dear Doc, I am confused about what kind of battery I should select for my boat. Lithium, AGM and even regular, old lead-acid batteries are being used by my boating buddies.

I have a small cuddy-cabin fishing boat that I use for family outings, as well as for family fishing. What is the best battery for me?

Terry Mahoney
New York, New York

A: Cost and application come into play. Wet-cell batteries—what you call "regular, old lead-acid batteries"—work just fine in your application. AGM batteries will cost you more, but they will probably last longer, hold their charge better, and won't leak corrosive acid or off-gas corrosive and flammable fumes. It's your call, but you can probably tell which type I favor.

Lithium-iron-phosphate batteries serve deep-cycle needs—such as for trolling motors—very well. It doesn't sound like you have need of lithium batteries.

Whether you go wet-cell or AGM, make sure the batteries provide the correct cranking amperage per the owner's manual for your engine, and have enough reserve capacity to run your normal complement of 12-volt devices for the period of time you normally run them with the engine off.

THIN WIRES

Q: Doc, how can I connect thin, 22-gauge wire for my marine electronics? Are there no crimp-style butt connectors that size?

Jack Martin
Columbia, South Carolina

A: For light gauge wire like that, I will usually solder the wires together and then shrink-wrap the joint to give it strength. (Solder can be brittle.) In a pinch, you can also strip back more wire than you would normally use for a crimped connector. Double it back on itself and twist it together. Now you should get a proper fit in a connector that would normally be too large.

WAX THE DECK?

Q: Hi, Boat Doctor. I just bought a new-to-me boat—a 2021 Cobalt—and I have a question. I realize that the nonskid surface will become slippery if I wax it with regular boat wax, but I was wondering if there was some kind of protectant that might be special for boat decks that would not make it slippery? I know that surfboards are waxed to improve grip. Is there anything like that for boats?

Roger Parker
Joplin, Missouri

A: No. All you need to do is keep the cockpit sole and deck of your boat clean. Regular application of soap and a scrub brush should do it.

Good luck with your Cobalt!

ASK THE DOCTOR

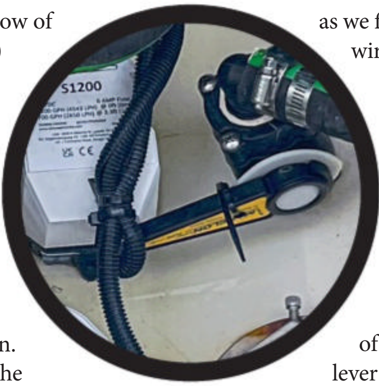
Send questions to Mick with your name and boating location to boatdr@boatingmag.com.

NAUTICAL
NO-NO

BLOCKED SEACOCK HANDLES

One of the things that *Boating* editors look for when inspecting the bilge of a test boat is operationality of the seacocks. Seacocks are the valves that control the flow of raw water into (or waste out of) the boat for things such as the engine, generator or electric motor cooling, a cockpit washdown, a livewell, the head, and more. We check that the hose is properly fastened; that it has been installed robustly, and in a good location; and that steps have been taken to mitigate corrosion.

Another thing we do during the course of our inspection is to throw the levers of each and every seacock. Doing so reveals whether the lever or handle can even be reached. Secondly, throwing each handle shows whether the seacock can actually be opened or closed. Trying to operate the seacock pictured above revealed that its lever was impeded by wiring. We could move the lever, as long as we first pulled the wires out of the way.



That's all well and good during a dockside inspection. It's another matter when a hose bursts out on rough water and you need to reach down underwater to shut the valve and keep the boat from flooding.

This is not the worst example of a seacock installed so that its lever operation was impeded that we have seen. We've seen some where the handle struck a stringer, or a piece of equipment, and could not be thrown at all. A seacock installed so that it cannot be operated creates a safety hazard. Look for this while shopping for a boat. —*KF*

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY WEST MARINE; KEVIN FALVEY

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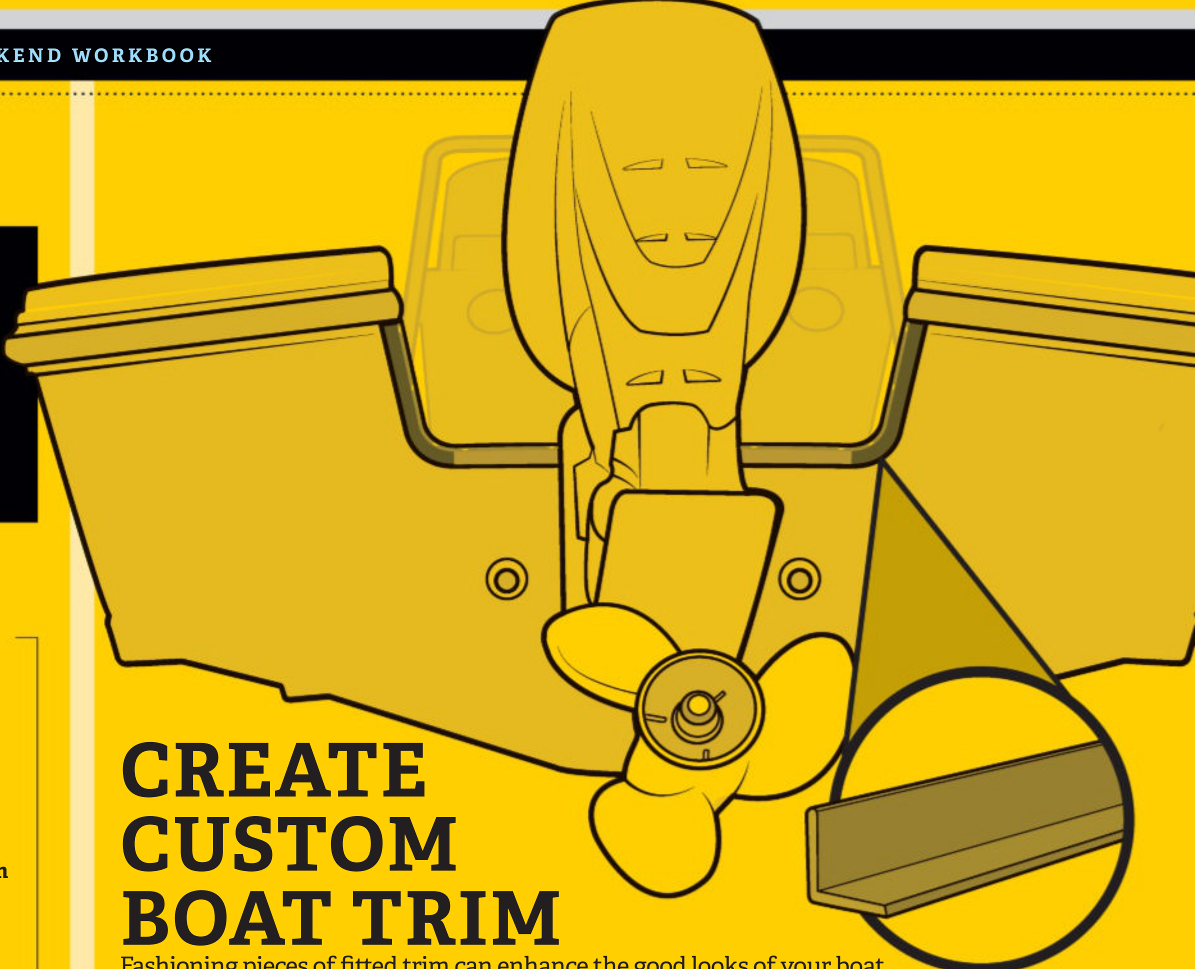


CREATE CUSTOM BOAT TRIM

Fashioning pieces of fitted trim can enhance the good looks of your boat.

After 30 years of saltwater use, the intricately curved anodized-aluminum trim along the cap of the open transom of my outboard-powered 21-foot center-console fishing boat was falling apart. Corrosion had eaten away at the metal, and its once-lustrous finish was now crusty and riddled with ragged holes.

I wanted to buy new trim from the factory, but production of the model had long ceased, and no replacement trim was available. Commissioning a custom piece of trim from a fabricator proved a bit too expensive for my budget.

Making my own seemed like the way to go. I started with 1-inch aluminum 90-degree angle stock for the straight run across the outboard edge of the transom where the liner meets the hull. On each end of the straight run, however, the transom curves upward to meet the rail cap. Bending the aluminum stock proved too difficult for me, so I turned to another material—1-inch PVC 90-degree angle stock—to adjoin and bookend the aluminum trim. The PVC is 3⁄16-inch thick, which is drillable and holds fasteners well, and the light-gray color complements my boat and blends well with the aluminum angle stock. It is available in up to 6-foot lengths for $21.08 each from grainger.com.

PVC angle stock is rigid and chemical-resistant but becomes malleable with the application of mild heat, and so it can conform nicely to inside and outside bends. It returns to a rigid state once it cools. Here are the steps I followed to shape one curving piece of trim, a process that needs to be repeated in a mirror image on the opposite side. *—Jim Hendricks*

SKILL LEVEL

2.5 OF 5

FINISH TIME

Approx. 3-4 hours per each curved piece of trim

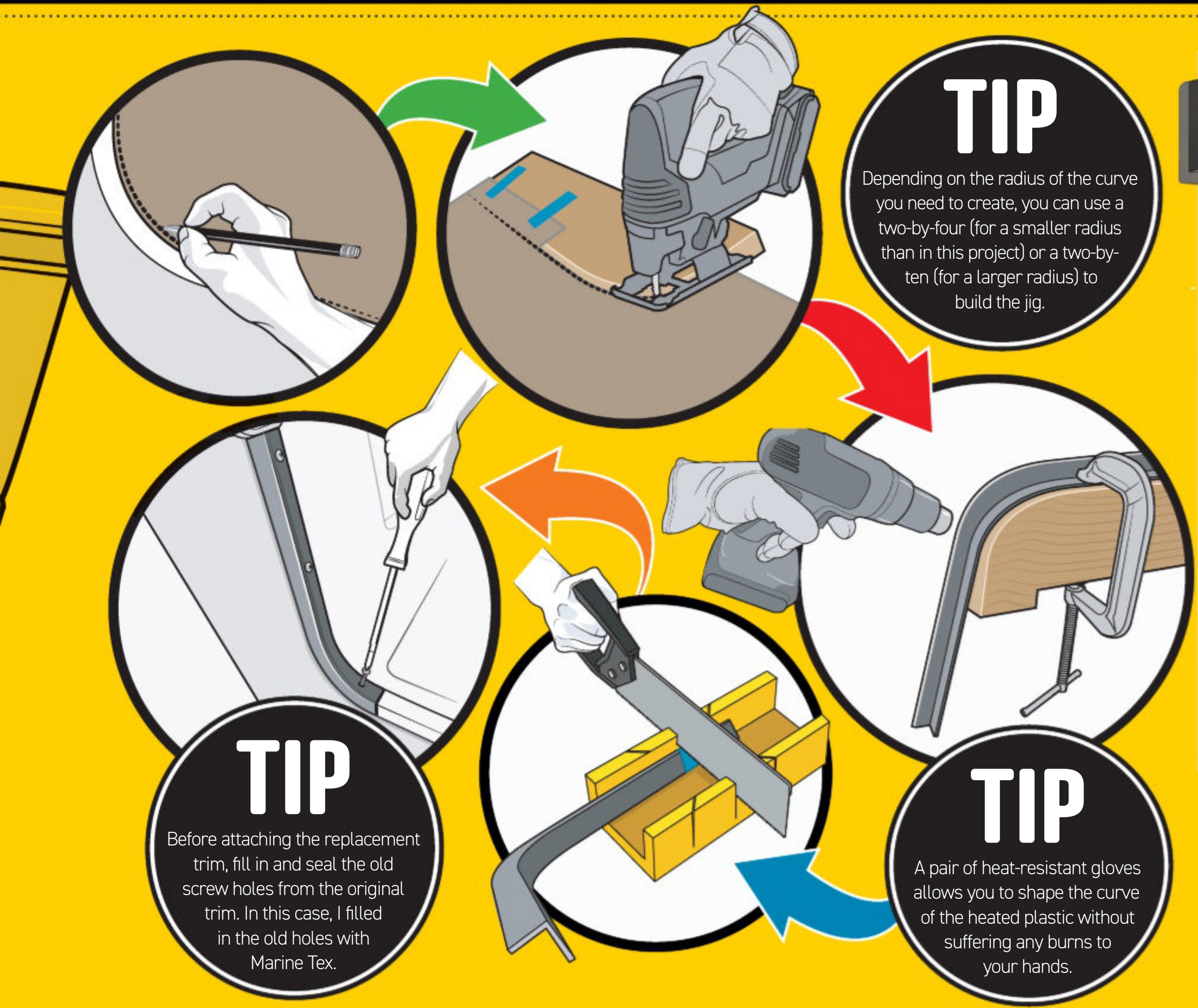
TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

- PVC 90-degree 1-inch angle stock ($21.08/6-foot length; grainger.com)
- 2-foot-long piece of two-by-six hardwood lumber
- Jig saw or coping saw
- Scrap cardboard and masking tape
- Pencil or marker
- Heavy-duty scissors and razor cutter
- Assorted vises and clamps
- Heat-resistant gloves
- Heat gun
- Miter box and fine-tooth back saw
- Bastard file
- Power drill and bit set
- No. 10 Phillips ¾-inch-long truss-head self-tapping screws
- Phillips screwdriver
- Marine sealant
- Shop rags (to wipe away excess sealant)

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

I've found that it's a good idea to practice the heat-and-bend process a couple of times, so consider buying some extra lengths of the inexpensive PVC angle stock and give it a try or two. Who knows? You might get it perfect the first time. But practicing can't hurt, and it can help you perfect this technique.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JIM HATCH



TIP

Depending on the radius of the curve you need to create, you can use a two-by-four (for a smaller radius than in this project) or a two-by-ten (for a larger radius) to build the jig.

TIP

Before attaching the replacement trim, fill in and seal the old screw holes from the original trim. In this case, I filled in the old holes with Marine Tex.

TIP

A pair of heat-resistant gloves allows you to shape the curve of the heated plastic without suffering any burns to your hands.

+ TACO TRIM

An alternate PVC angle stock is available from Taco Marine. Taco's No. V25-0240 angle stock is about ⅞ inch on each side, so it is slightly smaller than the industrial construction material used in this project. However, Taco's uses a UV-resistant PVC compound, while ours did not. Additionally, Taco's angle stock is far more expensive, retailing for as much as $110 for a 12-foot length (without shipping) at boatandrvaccessories.com.

CREATE A TEMPLATE If you have not done so already, remove the old trim. If it comes off without bending or breaking, you can use the old trim as the template to build a jig as outlined in the next step. If the old trim is not usable for this purpose, securely tape a piece of cardboard against the outside of the transom, then with a pencil or marker, carefully trace along the curve of the transom. Then remove the cardboard and cut carefully with pair of scissors or a razor cutter with a fresh blade along the line you traced. This piece of cardboard will serve as your template for building a jig to shape an inside curve in the PVC stock.

BUILD A JIG I used a piece of two-by-six hardwood lumber about 2 feet in length to build the jig. Using the template, trace the radius of the curve so that it carries from the top edge of the wood to merge with the end of the piece of lumber. Next, use a jig saw or coping saw to cut carefully along the line that you drew, ensuring that the cut is as perpendicular as possible to the broad side of the board, thus creating a flat surface on the narrow edge for clamping and bending the PVC 90-degree angle stock. If not, you might have to sand the narrow edge of lumber to obtain a flat and level surface after the cut.

HEAT AND BEND Lock the jig into a vice with the broad side vertical and the curved portion on top and hanging over the edge of your work surface to allow the heated PVC to bend around the end of the board. Clamp one side of the PVC angle stock to the top of the jig so that the other side of stock is oriented upward (to accommodate the inside curve). Gently and slowly warm the PVC in the area of the bend with a heat gun. Keep moving the heat gun to avoid overheating or crinkling of the plastic. As it softens, guide the stock carefully around the radius of the curve until you have created the desired bend.

FIT AND TRIM Let the angle stock completely cool with the clamps in place until the PVC angle stock becomes rigid again. Then unclamp it from the jig, and test-fit it to the transom edges to ensure that the newly curved piece follows the bend and fits flush on all surfaces. Assuming a good fit, also note where you need to trim the PVC stock on each end, marking both with a piece of masking tape. Cut the angle stock to fit with a miter box and a fine-tooth back saw. Leave at least ⅛ to 1⁄16 inch of extra length on each end. This will allow you to file down the last little bit of material for the tightest fit possible.

DRILL AND SECURE Refit the piece of trim in place—recheck your cuts to make sure everything fits well and flush. Then mark the best location for the mounting screws. Avoid screwing into the apex of the curving portion of the trim or along the vertical leg of the angle stock. Instead, secure it along the straight horizontal portions of the PVC. Drill pilot holes with a No. 21 bit through the trim and into the transom cap, and use stainless-steel ¾-inch-long No.10 Phillips truss-head self-tapping screws. Bed the surfaces and pilot holes with marine sealant. Don't overtighten the screws so as to prevent cracking the plastic.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JIM HATCH; PHOTO: COURTESY TACO MARINE

HOW TO CLEAT A DOCK LINE

The proper way to belay to a cleat.

I used to work with a former tugboat captain who taught me many things, including how to properly cleat a line. Walking the docks at the marina where we worked, he'd spot incorrectly cleated lines and retie them properly. Naturally, under most conditions, the different ways of cleating off—such as simply doing lots of figure eights, or not starting with a turn around the base of the cleat, or even simply wrapping line around and around—will hold in many situations. Still, because we have to cleat off some way anyway, we might as well be in the habit of doing it the best way we can. Here is that method, along with the reasons for each element. *—Rick Shackleton*

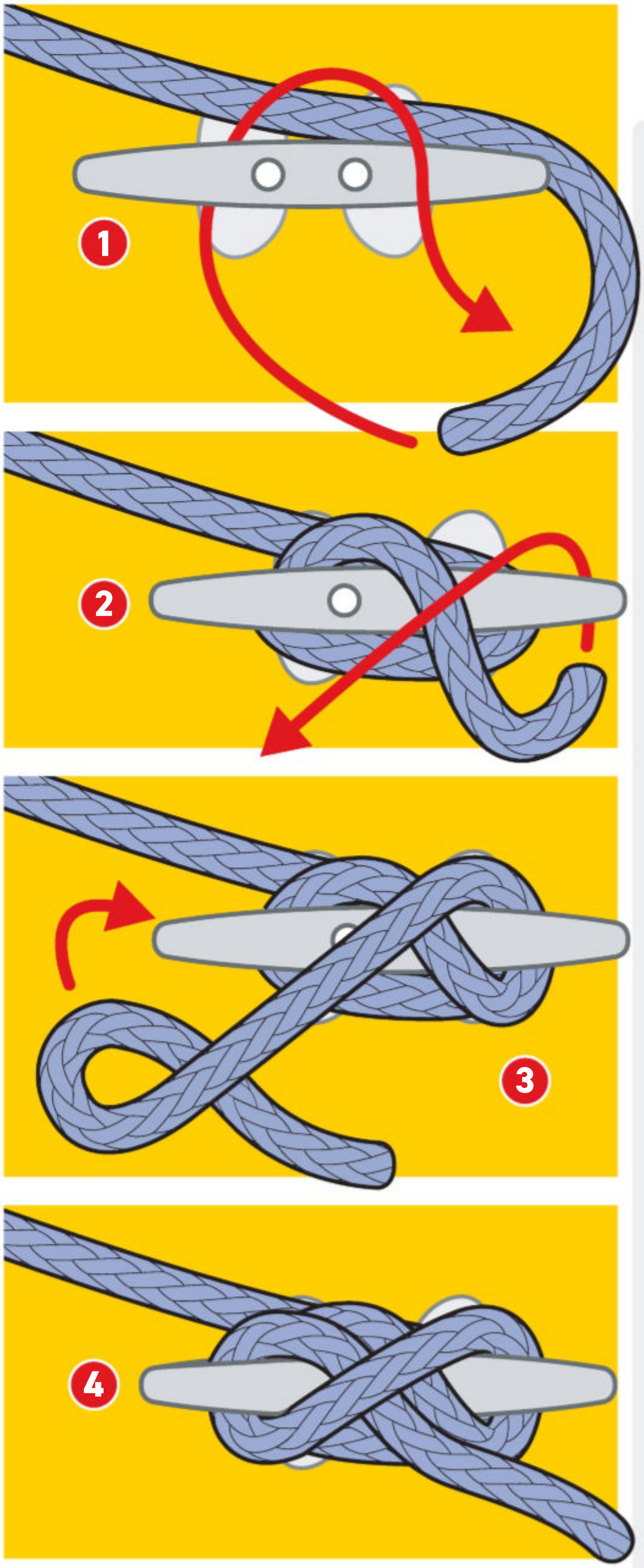
1. TAKE A TURN AROUND THE BASE Start by taking a turn around the base of the cleat with the line. This ensures that the load is spread evenly on all fasteners holding the cleat to the dock or boat. With respect to direction of pull on the line, take the line around the far horn first and then back under the closest horn. Now proceed to Step 2.

2. FIGURE EIGHT After taking the line round under both horns, cross the line from under the nearest horn diagonally over the top of the cleat and then under the horn farthest away. Next, bring the line from under the farthest horn back diagonally across the top of the cleat. When looked at from above, you have formed a figure eight. This ensures that you are spreading the load evenly across both horns of the cleat. Proceed to Step 3.

3. HALF HITCH Make the half hitch by bending the bitter end of the line under itself to form a loop. Place the loop over the horn. Pull the tag end to snug it all up. The half hitch locks the cleat hitch in place and prevents the line from slipping. Remember that in strong wind or rough waves, the line will be stretching—changing diameter—and the boat or dock structure might be flexing and vibrating. These can all cause line that is seemingly secure to slip. So, please: Add the half hitch.

4. BE NEAT Be neat with any excess line. You don't have to flemish it into coil, but do take care to arrange it neatly and in a way that others on the dock won't trip over. If the cleat is vertical on a pole or pile, you can hang loops of excess line on the cleat.

TIP Making multiple figure eights across the cleat doesn't make the tie more secure. What it does do is take up all the space on the cleat, preventing you or others from using the cleat for another line, a fender, a bait cart or other item. A single figure eight is sufficient.



ILLUSTRATIONS: JIM HATCH

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* The instant rebate option is only on select new (unused, not previously warranty registered) eligible MY 2025 to MY 2019 SunCatcher pontoon boat models. The instant rebate of up to $5,000 (exact amount dependent on the model purchased) is applied at the time of final sale by dealer, at no extra cost. See dealer for model eligibility. The instant rebate option of this Promotion is only applicable from authorized participating G3 dealers in the U.S.A. and Canada to customers residing in the U.S.A. or Canada.

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NIGHT-VISION TECHNOLOGY

If you want to boat more safely at night, night-vision technology can help minimize your odds of getting off course or missing a hidden aid-to-navigation post or piece of flotsam. There are two basic technologies to open night eyes. Let's see what those are. —*Randy Vance*

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE Light is electromagnetic energy measured in nanometers. The human eye can see wavelengths between 380 nm, beginning at violet and bordering on ultraviolet, and 700 nm, which is red and bordering on invisible infrared. The shorter wavelengths of violet and blue range from 380 nm to about 500 nm. They are weaker and are the first to fade from human visibility in low light. From 500 nm to 600 nm—the end of blue to the beginning of red—the waves are longer and stronger, and are last to fade from visibility. Past 700 nm, the waves are long, strong and invisible. But you can feel them—they emit infrared heat.

DIGITAL NVG PRO
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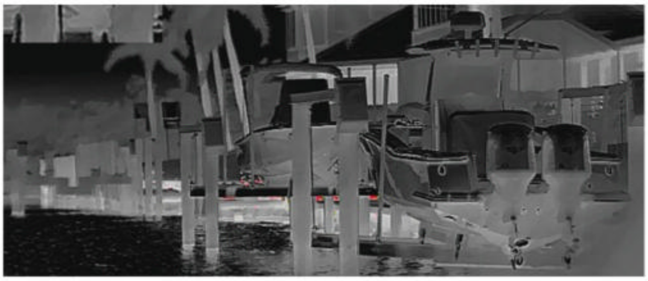
OFF

FEELING THE HEAT Optics such as those offered by X Vision and FLIR sense infrared light waves and can detect temperature differences of less than 1 degree. It is the IR devices' sensitivity to minute temperature changes from one object to another that allows them to project highly detailed images on an IR sensor.



MODERN NIGHT VISION Newer night-vision technology such as the Sionyx Aurora Pro ($849, sionyx.com) captures available light from 380 nm UV to nearly 1,100 nm infrared, amplifies it, and projects it onto a digital sensor rather than the old-school phosphorous-charged sensor that rendered the green imaging we see in war movies. The digital sensor yields an image that is closer to photographic and shockingly detailed with no apparent light, and it fills in a lack of color with infrared imaging. It can transmit near-real-time imaging to external displays via a micro HDMI cable or to a smart device via Wi-Fi. It doubles as a still or video camera in dark or daylight and stores images on a microSD card. Should you want to mount such a device, look for the standard ¼-by-20-inch threaded tripod socket.

INFRARED SCOPES FLIR is the longest-running brand in marine infrared technology for mariners, but there are other companies in the market too, such as X Vision, which makes scopes and binoculars. I like the TB 300 binocular for its crisp IR image, its ability to change the color gradient for visual preferences, and for its 16x zoom. Image hotspots can be illuminated in contrasting colors for helpful detail at a glance. It can detect temperature differences of 0.05 degrees Fahrenheit. It has a detection range of 1,500 yards, with strong detail to 500 yards, rendering outstanding clarity with a 16x zoom. A laser range finder works to 1,500 yards and gives better situational awareness in the dark, when depth perception is weakest. Wi-FI connectivity allows displaying images on a smart device.

SHIP-MOUNTED DEVICES Fixed-mounted devices are valued for their stability and hands-free use on larger vessels. On smaller vessels, chop jostles the camera, and unless it is optically stabilized, the image can jump around on the display. Sionyx's Nightwave camera ($1,895, sionyx.com) can be mounted upright or upside down and the image flipped with the software. It isn't stabilized per se, but its method of upsizing the image to a display softens the effect of the chop. In IR devices, be sure to choose one with image stabilization—an important but costly upgrade—or stick with the flexibility of handhelds.

Night-vision technology is widely available, and growing competition makes it more affordable every day.

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY X VISION, RANDY VANCE (2), COURTESY SIONYX

2870 SSX / BREAKING THE MOLD

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CLOSED OR OPEN?

We compare Stingray's 23 OSX bowrider and OCX cuddy.

It's not often that we get to compare two of the same hulls with different deck configurations from the same manufacturer. What a bonus when they're both high-performance outboards! Stingray Boats of Hartsville, South Carolina, recently released its 23 OSX bowrider and sistership OCX cuddy cabin.

On a sunny May afternoon on Stingray's home lake, these two 23-footers powered by 300 hp outboards provided great fun and driving experiences, as well as a great comparison between these two styles of boats. It doesn't hurt that they're built well and loaded with cool features.

Drew Gantt is a design engineer at Stingray and was deeply involved in the OSX/OCX execution. He notes that the bottom design comes from the boatbuilder's previous 225SX featuring Stingray's famous patented "Z-Plane" design. With no flat running pad like other performance V-hulls, it's easy to drive even the first time out. Modified with added length and beam, and set back to handle larger loads and today's heavier outboard engines, the entire boat is CAD-designed and goes through simulated testing before a plug is ever made. It's built from 100 percent composites, so there's no wood to rot, and it presents a solid ride with no rattling or creaking. All backing plates for cleats, eyes and rails are composite. There's no core in the running surfaces; it's all woven roving, stitched fiberglass, and mat with stringers. The transom is a new foam core, infused with resin. Everything is bonded together, even the stringers to the hull and deck, with no bedding putty. Warranty is lifetime on the hull and one year on everything else.

This boat is large for a single outboard: At 23 feet, 5 inches long and 8 feet, 4 inches wide, it weighs almost 3,400 pounds without a trailer. The stated maximum capacity is 10 people, but a group of five or six would be more comfortable and realistic.

Each of our two test hulls was powered with a 300—the OSX bowrider with a Yamaha and the OCX cuddy with a Suzuki. This is significant, because while both are 300 hp V-6 four-strokes, the two use vastly different gear ratios in the drive units. The Yamaha uses a 1.75-to-1 ratio, which is a common

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PHOTOS: COURTESY STINGRAY BOATS

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gear ratio in larger, powerful outboards. The Suzuki employs a much shorter 2.08-to-1 ratio. Theoretically, that would give the Suzuki the acceleration advantage and the Yamaha the top-speed edge. Of course, these differences can be mitigated with careful propeller selection. The Yamaha was fitted with a 23-inch-pitch Yamaha Pro Series stainless-steel three-blade. The Suzuki employed a (gasp!) Mercury 28-inch-pitch Bravo 1 four-blade. Why the Mercury wheel? According to Stingray techs, in testing, it outperformed the stock Suzuki propellers handily, but more testing is scheduled for the near future.

While both are great performers, the OSX bowrider outperformed the OCX cuddy. We recorded 68.3 mph at 6,000 rpm with two aboard and a half-tank of fuel, in 6-inch windblown lake chop. The canary-yellow OCX cuddy saw a best of 64.7 mph at 6,500 rpm with the same passenger and fuel load. From a dead in-gear idle, the OSX bowrider planed in 3.6 seconds; we hit 30 mph in 5.4 seconds. The OCX cuddy was decidedly less quick, planing in 5.4 seconds. Zero to 30 mph took 7.9 seconds. In the fuel-economy contest, the bowrider won again; best cruise was at 3,500 rpm and 37.9 mph, netting 4.9 mpg. The OCX cuddy's best was at 3,000 rpm and 24.6 mph, a best of 4.6 mpg. So the bowrider got better mileage, and at nearly 14 mph faster. In a boat like this Stingray, the ability to cruise faster while getting good fuel mileage is a decided advantage.

OSX AND OCX SPECS · **LOA:** 23'5" · **BEAM:** 8'4" · **DEADRISE AT TRANSOM:** 20 degrees · **DRAFT:** 1'1" · **DISPLACEMENT:** 3,364 lb. (with engine) · **SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY:** 10/2,080 lb. · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 56 gal.

STINGRAY 23 OSX BOWRIDER

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	5.2	6.0	1.4	3.7	4.3	186.1	214.2	3	66
1500	6.8	7.8	2.4	2.8	3.3	142.3	163.8	5	69
2000	7.6	8.8	4.2	1.8	2.1	91.8	105.6	5	73
2500	12.5	14.4	5.0	2.5	2.9	125.7	144.6	6	77
3000	25.9	29.8	6.1	4.2	4.9	213.6	245.8	3	79
3500	32.9	37.9	7.7	4.3	4.9	215.6	248.1	2	79
4000	39.0	44.9	11.3	3.5	4.0	174.0	200.3	2	82
4500	46.0	52.9	15.0	3.1	3.5	154.5	177.7	2	83
5000	51.3	59.0	19.0	2.7	3.1	136.0	156.5	2	85
5500	56.3	64.8	24.3	2.3	2.7	116.8	134.4	2	88
6000	59.3	68.3	25.9	2.3	2.6	115.4	132.8	2	90

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

HOW WE TESTED: ENGINE: Yamaha F300 four-stroke **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Yamaha Pro Series 14½" x 23" 3-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 1.75:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 28 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 450 lb. **PRICE:** $104,434 (as tested)

STINGRAY 23 OCX CUDDY

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.7	5.5	1.2	3.9	4.5	198.9	228.9	1	62
1500	6.3	7.3	2.4	2.6	3.0	132.3	152.3	3	67
2000	7.3	8.4	3.4	2.1	2.5	107.6	123.8	5	71
2500	10.5	12.1	5.2	2.0	2.3	101.9	117.3	7	73
3000	21.4	24.6	5.3	4.0	4.6	203.3	233.9	4	79
3500	24.6	28.4	6.3	3.9	4.5	197.1	226.8	3	82
4000	30.3	34.9	8.1	3.7	4.3	188.7	217.2	2	85
4500	35.6	41.0	10.7	3.3	3.8	167.6	192.9	2	86
5000	41.3	47.5	13.0	3.2	3.7	160.0	184.2	2	88
5500	48.4	55.8	17.6	2.8	3.2	138.7	159.6	2	90
6000	53.8	62.0	22.6	2.4	2.7	120.1	138.2	1	92
6500	56.2	64.7	25.4	2.2	2.5	111.5	128.3	1	94

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

HOW WE TESTED: ENGINE: Suzuki 300 four-stroke **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Mercury Bravo I 15¼" x 28" 4-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 2.08:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 28 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 450 lb. **PRICE:** $108,923 (as tested)

STINGRAY BOATS
Hartsville, South Carolina; stingrayboats.com

Because the weights of both hulls are nearly identical, it's clear that some propeller, engine height and setback tweaking is in order if the OCX cuddy is to be competitive with the OSX bowrider. While the OCX's sculpted deck might look cooler, even the cost advantage goes to the OSX bowrider; similarly equipped, it's about $5,000 less.

In these boats, the differences are all forward of the windshield. The OSX's bowrider section features two wide lounge seats with backrests facing forward, with ample room for two to stretch out. The seating is plush and detailed, in a white-and-deep-gray-vinyl combo that looks crisp without being drab. Folding armrests, stainless-steel grab rails, and plenty of cup holders are featured up front and also in the cockpit. At the bow between the seats, there's a built-in insulated cooler and a very cool anchor locker with slide-out anchor holder.

The OCX cuddy looks svelte and dashing with a long, pointed deck that's sculpted for more strength and style. Under the deck, there's a double V-berth that's plenty long; Gantt is 6 feet, 3 inches tall, and he fits with room to spare. A center section cover conceals a portable toilet. The hull sides are fitted with upholstered, padded rails to keep small items from getting lost. There's a sink, phone charger, a pair of stereo speakers, a mount for a small gas grill, courtesy lights, and a round access hatch in the center of the deck. A headliner is well-fitted and covers the fiberglass for a neat appearance. The liner is fiberglass for easy cleanup. There's easy access to the backside of the dash if troubleshooting is needed. Access from the cockpit is through a custom-made acrylic and plastic doorway with articulated hinges.

From the windshield back, the OCX and OSX are identical. The only option on each of our test boats was the Garmin display; everything else is standard, including digital switching and a Yamaha or Suzuki digital engine monitor. Tilt hydraulic steering coupled with electric power assist is standard. A Fusion sound system with amplifier and six speakers is standard. The self-bailing cockpit is a huge advantage when boarding soaking-wet passengers or even just forgetting to cover it when it rains. The pilot and navigator sit in deep, plush bucket seats that provide great stability and security at higher speeds. Just aft, two longitudinal lounge seats blend into and around a full-width stern bench seat.

Under the stern seat, there's a door to quickly access the battery switch and fuel tank. Fully finished overboard-draining storage boxes are underneath both sternside lounger seats, which hinge up from the forward side and feature cantilever-hinge supports to keep them open for easy access. At the stern, there's a wide watersports platform with a built-in insulated cooler on the port side and extending stainless-steel boarding ladder under a hatch cover on the starboard side. The center section of the aft seat unlatches and hinges forward to access batteries, a water tank, bilge and water-tank pumps, all of which sit atop thick, gelcoated fiberglass covers that hide flotation foam underneath. The aft end is one very large storage compartment, great for life jackets, water toys and the like. The entire compartment is gelcoated smooth for easy cleanup.

Stingray's twin hot rods provide great options for those looking at performance outboard hulls, capable of lending speedy thrills while serving admirably towing watersports enthusiasts, hosting dinner cruises, and impressing the locals at sandbar parties. With so many opting for fast pontoons these days, it's refreshing to see fast outboard fiberglass hulls again. —*John Tiger*

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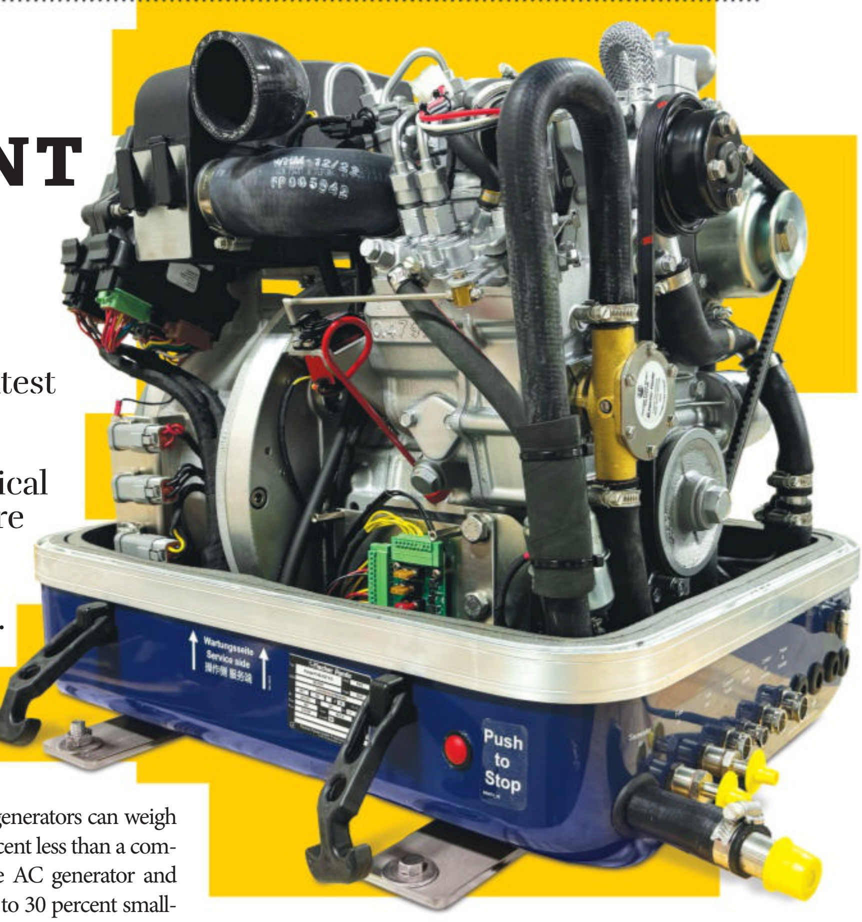
DIRECT-CURRENT GENERATORS

Direct-current marine generators represent a new alternative to traditional gensets.



A new breed of internal-combustion marine generator, combined with the latest in marine-battery technology, promises to change the way in which many new outboard-powered boats provide electrical power for onboard accessories. These are direct-current marine generators, and they differ from traditional alternating-current generators in a number of ways.

In the simplest of terms, an AC generator supplies power directly to a 120-volt circuit to run AC accessories throughout a boat, as well as charge the boat's batteries (through an AC-to-DC charger). A DC generator, on the other hand, directly charges the boat's batteries, which can, in turn, provide 120-volt power via an onboard DC-to-AC electrical inverter system.

One important caveat: Inverters are generally more limited in the AC power that they can supply versus a more robust AC generator. Accordingly, this generally limits the primary market for DC generators to boats less than about 55 feet in length overall.

That said, a DC generator can eliminate much of the complicated AC shore-power rigging and provide a seamless transition between the DC and AC systems, says Chad Godwin, OEM sales director for Fischer Panda, which currently offers two diesel-powered DC generators, as well as a full line of AC generators. The 12-volt AGT5 delivers 12 volts at 272 amps and is rated at 5 kW; the AGT6 produces 24/48 volts at 192/96.5 amps and is rated at 5.5 kW. The company also builds custom DC generators for boatbuilders.

Lending impetus to the development of DC generators is the growing use of marine lithium-iron-phosphate (LiFePO4) house batteries, which are lighter in weight, provide greater storage capacity, and recharge faster than traditional lead-acid AGM batteries. "A diesel-powered DC generator represents a near-perfect complement, providing faster, quieter, safer, and more-effective low-rpm charging than most outboard engines can deliver," Godwin contends.

DC generators also weigh less, require less space, and consume less fuel than AC generators. "The AGT generators can weigh 50 percent less than a comparable AC generator and are up to 30 percent smaller in size," Godwin says. "Because you don't have to continuously run a DC generator to power AC accessories, it consumes less fuel than an AC generator."

In many ways, Fischer Panda's DC generators are an answer to Navico's Fathom e-Power system. Instead of a marine generator, Fathom uses high-output alternators in select Mercury outboards to supply DC power to charge a bank of LiFePO4 house batteries. However, outboards need to rev at fairly high rpm to ensure that the battery system can keep up with heavier-load accessories such as an air conditioner. The Fischer Panda AGT6 8.8 hp generator provides an effective alternative when using outboards at low rpm such as when slow-trolling. Of course, the Fischer Panda DC generators require that most boats have a separate diesel-fuel system.

Like the Fathom system, Fischer Panda's AGT generators also have an automatic feature that monitors a boat's battery bank and turns on and off in auto mode to keep batteries correctly charged.

These water-cooled generators are also extremely quiet, registering just 66 dB(A) for the AGT6 when measured at a distance of 7 meters, according to Fischer Panda. These lower sound levels, combined with intermittent usage, mean you could conceivably run the generator in a mooring or in an anchorage without unduly annoying your neighboring boaters.

The diesel-fuel requirement for the AGT system presents both benefits and drawbacks. On the plus side, diesel exhaust minimizes those dangerous carbon-monoxide fumes associated with gasoline exhaust. On the downside, as pointed out earlier, a fuel tank dedicated to diesel fuel will be needed aboard almost any outboard-powered boat equipped with this generator system.

Fischer Panda is currently supplying DC generators to four boatbuilders for outboard-powered models within each of their lineups. This includes the new Regal 50 SAV, which features the factory-installed DC generator system that it has dubbed "LivePower."

—Jim Hendricks

PHOTO: COURTESY FISCHER PANDA

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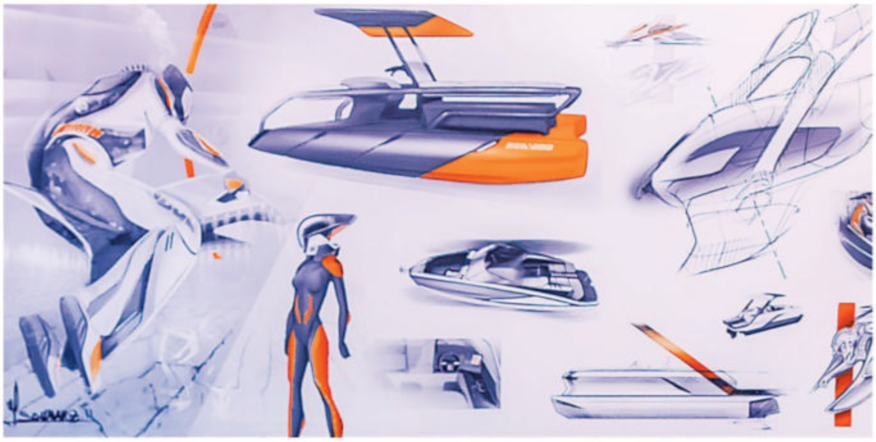
10 BOW TO STERN WARRANTY LIFETIME STRUCTURAL

BRP TECH

We tour the Bombardier Recreational Products design center and find innovation turning dreams into recreational reality.

"We have the power to change the world for the better," says BRP Chief Design Officer Denys LaPointe.



HISTORY In 1937, 15-year-old Joseph Armand Bombardier invented the Ski Doo to traverse the snowy streets of Quebec. His company grew into railway and aerospace, and was sold in 2003 to an investor group for billions. Sea-Doo personal watercraft, Can-Am all-terrain vehicles and BRP-leading boat lines followed, and now include Manitou Pontoons, Alumacraft fishing boats, and the Sea-Doo Switch pontoons (a *Boating* Boat of the Year awardee) with PWC maneuverability powered by BRP's Rotax engines. Rotax is a 100-year-old Austrian propulsion company, purchased by Bombardier in 1970 to power its vehicles and vessels. BRP recently added a Rotax outboard as a power option for its Manitou pontoons and Alumacraft fishing boats (conventional outboards are also available).

INNOVATIVE DESIGN BRP recently invested $15 million to renovate its Palm Bay, Florida, design center (two other centers exist in France and Quebec), and invited *Boating* for a behind-the-scenes look. The 6-acre facility sits on a large lake, ideal for testing, surrounded by a sandy track for ATV trials. While running vessels and vehicles to their breaking point might sound like fun, it is the serious endgame for the staff of 60 in Palm Bay. A new offering could require 200 to 300 hours of testing—that is years of development.

New stuff starts with 3D and computer-aided-design drawings. Next, prototypes are built by 3D printing, by CAD-cut aluminum or by hand-cut wood. Those molds are then 3D-scanned and reviewed by teams of electrical and mechanical engineers, viewing the vessel or vehicle through the lenses of virtual reality and sustainability. This examination process is applied not only to its products, but also its own facilities, and takes years of interaction among the various design centers and departments.

NEW PRODUCT The innovative design process was exemplified in the development of the Rotax outboard engine. It began with field observation. According to Curt Wilson, director of design and advanced concepts, BRP boat-show staff overheard a woman voicing intrusion and safety concerns about traditional outboard engines. Because the market clamored for outboard engines, BRP went to work on how to get the outboard out of the way while keeping its benefits, and while using a Rotax engine as a foundation.

The low-profile outboard, which installs under the wide-open MAX Deck model Manitou and Alumacraft boats, debuted two years ago. It accommodates a broader swim platform, and while the propellers are the same, it diminishes the fear of injuries and tangled lines, while access to the water for tubing and swimming is enhanced. In addition, higher fuel efficiency and lower carbon emissions reflect BRP's goals of lowering carbon footprint, protecting the environment, and incorporating innovation into products.

LET IT RIP! As LaPointe summarizes, "By combining design and advanced concepts with R&D, we are able to explore new possibilities, and create products that offer unique, innovative, and exciting adventures for our riders."

From seeing the original 1959 Sea-Doo in the lobby to running the new 300 hp Fish Pro and new Manitou pontoons on the lake to careening around in a Can-Am Defender, I can vouch for BRP's dedication to innovation and the exciting adventures that result. *—Marilyn DeMartini*

PHOTOS: COURTESY BRP

SOLARA

S-250 DC S-250 CW S-250 C S-310 CW S-310 SC

VISIT US AT
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INTRODUCING
THE S-250 DC

SCAN FOR FUN

YAMAHA
NMMA CERTIFIED

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BOATINGLAB

By Randy Vance

PHONE CHARGING AND MOUNTING SYSTEMS

Boatbuilders recognize that everyone on board uses a phone—posting, Snapping, TikToking, and more—between leaving port and returning. To keep the social posting live, everybody needs a power port or charger, many of which securely hold your phone. We've tested numerous different phone holders and chargers, while testing boats. We selected those that follow because of their ease of installation and use on any boat.

SCANSTRUT

ROKK CHARGE PRO
$49.99; defender.com

USB and USB-C connections can be vulnerable to corrosion in moist and salty air if they aren't protected. Scanstrut makes an entire series of ports with water-resistant covers that keep them dry when not in use. In fact, a new series, the ROKK Charge Pro, is also water-resistant when cords are in place.

The SC-Multi-F2 Flip Pro Duo has plenty of versatility, with USB and USB-C ports and a 12-volt socket. The unit mounts in dual 1-inch-diameter holes and requires a 10-amp fuse. With a 12- or 24-volt supply to the charging socket, power is also jumped to the USB ports. At 12 volts' input, the Flip Pro can charge two phones at 36 watts each. When not in use, the cover snaps tightly over the ports, forming an IPX4 waterproof seal.

OVERALL DIMENSIONS: 0.78" x 3.15" x 1.73"
FOOTPRINT DIMENSIONS: 3.15" x 1.73"
CUTTING DIMENSIONS: Dual 1.25" holes, 1.5" on center
WATERPROOF RATING: IPX4 (splashing water)
VOLTAGE INPUT: 12/24
FUSE: 10 amp
OUTPUT 12 VOLTS: 36 watts x 2
OUTPUT 24 VOLTS: 60 watts x 2

MOUNTING TIPS: Install using existing 12-volt outlet plug and wire. Mask the second hole to avoid chipping and tear-out, secure template over existing hole, and drill with a 1-inch step drill bit.

SCANSTRUT

FLIP PRO SERIES
$32.29; defender.com

The ROKK Charge Pro remains waterproof while in use thanks to the cap that closes over the dual parallel USB plugs. The SC-USB-2 is equipped with USB-A and USB-C ports. It can charge two devices at 36 watts on 12 volts with 60 watts' output. It takes only a single 1⅛-inch-diameter hole to mount the device, and it requires a 10-amp fuse in the power line. When connected, and with the lid closed, the device is IPX6 waterproof.

OVERALL DIMENSIONS: 1.14" x 1.53" x 3.7"
FOOTPRINT DIMENSIONS: 1.53" x 3.7"
CUTTING DIMENSIONS: 1.125" hole
WATERPROOF RATING: IPX 6 closed (sprayed stream)
VOLTAGE INPUT: 12/24
FUSE: 10 amp
OUTPUT 12 VOLTS: 36 watts
OUTPUT 24 VOLTS: 60 watts

MOUNTING TIPS: Be sure of clearance behind the bulkhead. Mask the drill area to reduce chipping. Drill with a 1-inch step drill bit.

PHOTOS: COURTESY SCANSTRUT

SCANSTRUT

EDGE

$179.99; boatoutfitters.com

Scanstrut spans the Atlantic, with headquarters in America and the UK. They make brackets, mounts, and struts for everything from smartphones and radar to topside chart-plotter pods and iPads/tablets.

The Scanstrut Edge is a waterproof, wireless, inductive charger on a swivel pedestal designed to be mounted to the dash or bulkhead. Mounting it requires two screws and a power-cord hole, all hidden by the device once it is installed. Spring-loaded "jaws" expand to accept the phone and hold it securely while inductive 10-watt charging begins. The pedestal allows the phone to be tilted 60 degrees or swiveled from vertical to landscape mode, enhancing viewing—a particularly useful feature when the phone is used for navigation.

As an alternative, Scanstrut's Active ($149.99, boatoutfitters.com) wireless charger mounts only the flat clamping portion to any bulkhead. We find them mounted on dashboard bow-seating areas or compartments and cubbies, where phones are less likely to be viewed and used in place but still quickly available. Both mounts are sleek and complement the looks of dash panels and other bulkheads; mounting several avoids the need for crews to swap and share.

OVERALL DIMENSIONS: 2.9" x 8.17"
FOOTPRINT DIMENSIONS: 2.16" diameter
CUTTING DIMENSIONS: Three 1/8" screw holes, one 1/4" power-line hole
WATERPROOF RATING: IPX6 (sprayed stream)
VOLTAGE INPUT: 12/24
FUSE: 10 amp
OUTPUT 12 VOLTS: 10 watts
OUTPUT 24 VOLTS: 10 watts

MOUNTING TIPS: Be sure that the mounting area allows for 60-degree tilt and 90-degree vertical rotation to landscape orientation. Also be sure that the mounting charger and holder won't block the view of other items on the dash. Attach the template to the surface-mount area, and mark holes with an awl. Operate drill in reverse through the gelcoat to prevent chipping, then drill normally to finish.

PEAK DESIGN

PHONE CASES

Varies; peakdesign.com

Peak Design's expertise is in camera cases, packs, tripods and camera slings, plus modular-style phone cases and chargers, all of which barely scratch the surface of their accessorizing prowess. Modular accessories allow the owner to move phones from boat to bike to car to desktop to bedside, securing phones while charging them. Cases are available for most popular phones, and magnetic inductive bases work with or without Peak Design cases.

Peak phone cases (from $40) have a shallow, metal-rimmed socket on the back, which engages with the retractable teeth of various mounts. Buttons on either side of the square-mount base release the phone. While engaged, the case holds the phone firmly, even in sudden stops, unexpected potholes, and rough water. Charging bases (from $40) connect to the boat's 12- or 24-volt power system with USB-C/USB-A cables for inductive charging. Mounting bases (from $40) with 1-inch balls to connect to clamping mounts from Peak Design or suction-cup mounts by makers such as RAM Mounts. Silicone-rubber pipe straps offer another handy option to mount a phone at the helm on a rail or grab bar.

Adhesive dash mounts are also available. Though Peak Design's adhesive base is flexible to conform to contoured surfaces, we found them more reliable on flat surfaces.

OVERALL DIMENSIONS: Varies
FOOTPRINT DIMENSIONS: 1" to 3"
CUTTING DIMENSIONS: NA
WATERPROOF RATING: NA
VOLTAGE INPUT: 12/24
OUTPUT 12 VOLTS: 15 watts
OUTPUT 24 VOLTS: 15 watts

MOUNTING TIPS: Adhesive mounting is tricky. Follow the instructions, and don't use the mount for 24 hours. Suction-cup mounts need a perfectly clean, flat surface. If possible, use a rubber gasket under the pipe-clamp mounts. Mount devices where they aren't likely to be brushed against.

PHOTOS: (FROM LEFT) COURTESY SCANSTRUT; COURTESY PEAK DESIGN

C

BOATING
CERTIFIED
TEST

#3426

INTREPID 41 PANACEA

The combination of a smooth-riding single-stepped hull and luxury layout is close to perfection.

PHOTO: COURTESY INTREPID POWERBOATS

If, like me, you dozed through Ancient Greek Mythology class, Panacea was the goddess of all cures and solutions. And that is the perfect name for the new Intrepid 41. This big center-console will satisfy every one of your boating wishes and desires.

If speed is at the top of your boating checklist, get a tie-down for your hat. This new Intrepid easily nailed 61-plus mph, and that was in a not-so-friendly Gulf Stream. Our test boat boasted a trio of the standard Mercury V-10 400s clamped to the transom.

You can check the option box for twin Mercury V-12s, punching out 600 hp each, but warn your guests to bring extra sunglasses to replace the ones that will blow off their faces.

SCAN ME

To watch our video review of the Intrepid 41 Panacea, scan this tag or go to boatingmag.com/3426.

PHOTOS: COURTESY INTREPID POWERBOATS

You can bring a whole bunch of those friends too because the 41 Panacea is a party animal. An outdoor galley behind the helm seats features a grill to torture steaks, an Isotherm fridge to keep beverages chilled, a sink, and a pull-out cooler in case the fridge floweth over.

If you want to spend the night aboard with your significant other after blasting across to Bimini, Catalina or Nantucket, the spacious cabin sports 6 feet, 3 inches of headroom, a comfortably sized V-berth with convertible table, and a human-size enclosed head with shower and electric toilet. There's even a mini galley (microwave/sink/fridge), so you can have your morning coffee and croissants without leaving the cabin.

But will the 41 Panacea fish? Oh, yeah! The twin lighted livewells in aft corners of the cockpit have side windows so that you can check the health of your pilchards or pogies, macerators for sending off those baits that didn't make it to the hook, five rod holders across the transom (more along the rails), and a hardtop braced for outriggers. Foldout seating is shaded by the pullout awning hidden in that hardtop and fish boxes that

reside below the cockpit sole.

You say you're a diver? The oversize hull door to port (an Intrepid invention) is large enough to easily handle chubby divers and a big fish. A boarding ladder flips out from a hatch in the cockpit floor adjacent to the door.

The styling is the highly recognizable straight and rising Intrepid sheer that looks like it's going fast at anchor. The rakish hardtop, with full-height windshield and recessed speakers and lighting, adds to the swept-forward look.

Intrepid has perfected its high-speed, high-efficiency single-step hull, which aerates the running surface, allowing you to run faster, longer and farther. This is balanced by a trio of strakes on each side to fine-tune tracking and lift, plus hard chines that throw aside spray and stabilize the boat at trolling speed. Add to that the optional Seakeeper 3 gyrostabilizer, and the 41 is fire, as the kids say.

> Fender or dive-tank racks are hidden in coaming lockers to free the cockpit of fenders and dock lines.

As you'd expect in a go-fast boat, the skipper is awarded every desire. We applauded the comfortable seat with great lumbar support, as well as identical companion seats on either side. The no-distortion windshield ends at the stylish dash with twin 22-inch Garmin monitors and rows of Bocatech push-button switches for the various systems. Besides the Mercury Joystick Piloting for Outboards, the Vetus bow thruster aids in easy docking.

But this is only half the 41 Panacea, which also aspires to be a luxurious bowrider forward of the helm. Wide walkways lead to twin sun pads with hinged backrests atop the cabin, and the seating wraps around a high/low table that retracts electrically flush with the floor. Pop-up cleats and an underhatch Maxwell horizontal windlass keep the foredeck clear, and anchoring can be controlled both at the windlass and from the helm. A thoughtful touch: a washdown pump in the anchor locker to get rid of muck.

Speaking of uncluttered, the transom platform is a delight. Most outboard boats have a tangle of wires and hoses to trip anyone who ventures onto the platform, but all this maze is hidden below the Intrepid platform. You can step aboard from a dock, stroll safely across the platform in front of the Mercurys, and enter the cockpit through the starboard-side transom door.

When it comes to service, an oversize hatch allows you easy access to the undercockpit Paguro 8.5 kW genset, as well as the optional Seakeeper 3 gyrostabilizer.

Shopping around? Check out the Cigarette 41 Nighthawk ($1,279,000), with similar bad-boy looks, quad Mercury 500s and a more Spartan interior. A more conservative-looking boat that's a bit longer is the Tiara 43LS ($1,560,425 base price), which hits 56 mph with twin 600 hp Mercury Verado outboards.

Underway, I loved the 41 Panacea, upgraded using customer comments about the now-retired 40 Panacea with a new and wider hull. Even Aunt Edna is going to grin when you grab the Brodie knob on the fat 14-inch stainless-steel wheel that begs you to spin doughnuts. Put the hammers down, and the Panacea pops onto plane in just 5.3 seconds. Launch off a Gulf Stream graybeard, and the Panacea lands softly, begging for more.

The Panacea, as Greek gods know, is truly a boat for all reasons. *—Capt. Chris Caswell*

High Points

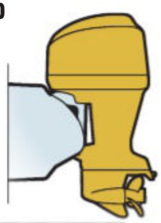
- ▶ I love the hidden hand grip that makes boarding through the hullside door safe and easy. Thoughtful, functional and executed with élan, it's the type of thing upon which Intrepid has built its reputation.
- ▶ Electric backrests installed in the forward lounges allow guests to sit up or recline without requiring the captain to stow or retrieve a removable backrest.
- ▶ Gutters in the deck hatches are deep enough to handle Biblical quantities of rain or energetic use of the washdown hose, and keep gear protected from moisture and corrosion.

Low Point

- ▶ The white dash reflects into the windshield, creating distracting "ghosts" and glare. I'd prefer a dark helm top for this reason.

· **LOA:** 41'0" · **BEAM:** 11'9" · **DRAFT:** 3'0" · **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** 21 degrees · **DISPLACEMENT:** 20,000 lb. · **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 12'6" · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 480 gal. · **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 1,500 · **AVAILABLE POWER:** Triple outboards to 1,500 hp total

Price: $1,300,000 (base)



AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD

HOW WE TESTED

ENGINES: Triple Mercury 400 hp V-10 Verado **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/16.8" x 19" Revolution X 4-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 2.09:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 275 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 650 lb.

INTREPID POWERBOATS
Largo, Florida; intrepidpowerboats.com

C
BOATING
CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	3.7	4.3	2.6	1.4	1.7	620.9	714.5	1	60
1500	7.6	8.7	9.0	0.8	1.0	362.9	417.6	1	62
2000	8.0	9.2	15.7	0.5	0.6	218.8	251.8	2	65
2500	10.3	11.9	20.5	0.5	0.6	217.0	249.7	3	72
3000	13.3	15.4	25.6	0.5	0.6	225.1	259.0	3	73
3500	18.4	21.2	32.0	0.6	0.7	248.1	285.5	2	74
4000	23.8	27.4	41.9	0.6	0.7	245.0	282.0	2	76
4500	34.1	39.3	48.9	0.7	0.8	301.3	346.7	2	78
5000	39.4	45.4	67.3	0.6	0.7	253.0	291.1	2	80
5500	43.8	50.4	80.2	0.5	0.6	235.7	271.2	2	80
6000	50.0	57.6	91.6	0.5	0.6	235.9	271.4	2	81
6500	53.4	61.5	101.3	0.5	0.6	227.7	262.1	2	81

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

PHOTO: COURTESY INTREPID POWERBOATS

WHEN YOU GO FULL FUSION,
EVERYTHING COMES TOGETHER.
GARMIN
Yellowfin
MERCURY
ENJOY LOUDER, CLEARER SOUND
WITH FUSION® DSP TECHNOLOGY*
Combine your Fusion stereo, amplifier and speakers for the best listening experience.
*Only available with DSP-enabled Fusion stereos.
*Shielded grilles are sold separately
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FUSION
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SCAN ME

To see a photo gallery of the Pursuit OS 325, scan this tag or go to boatingmag.com/3427.

PHOTO: COURTESY PURSUIT BOATS

Full disclosure: Boats and adult beverages are two of my favorite things, and I've realized that there are many similarities (besides being addictive). Some boats are beer (a good one like Heineken or Corona), while others are more like a fine Burgundy (a nice Montrachet will do).

But some, like the new Pursuit OS 325, are unquestionably Champagne: bubbly, light, and full of smiles (my first choice would be Dom Perignon, thank you).

This is a boat that checks all the boxes for an all-purpose fun boat as much a battlewagon with a bunch of anglers aboard as it is an afternoon cruiser with family and friends. It's the newest in Pursuit's Offshore series (hence the OS). And offshore it is, with a 20-degree deadrise hull,

C

BOATING CERTIFIED TEST

#3427

PURSUIT OS 325

This versatile cabin boat can fish or weekend, and handle open water, boasting a big-boat build and vibe.

PHOTOS: COURTESY PURSUIT BOATS

full-length strakes, and wide chine flats. The deadrise slices solid Gulf Stream swells, the strakes throw the spray far aside, and the chines make it stable at trolling speeds. With twin Yamaha 350s on our test boat, we topped out at 52-plus mph with full tanks and a bunch of folks aboard.

At a glance, you'll see the multiple gunwale rod holders and rocket launchers on the fiberglass hardtop. There's a 32-gallon transom livewell, and its class-leading storage includes the bait center with tackle trays, and lure tubes and drawers (in the cockpit console under the Kenyon grill and sink), and fish boxes in the floor—24- and 27-gallon—each with independent diaphragm pumps. You'd peg this as a fish boat. You'd be wrong.

Families are going to delight in the wraparound seating with table opposite the helm, and a pair of folding settees for Aunt Edna are in the cockpit with another removable table. The 12-inch side decks leading forward are surrounded by 24-inch welded stainless-steel rails from bow to cockpit, so the 325 is kid-safe too.

Step through the sliding door next to the helm into the cabin and—oh

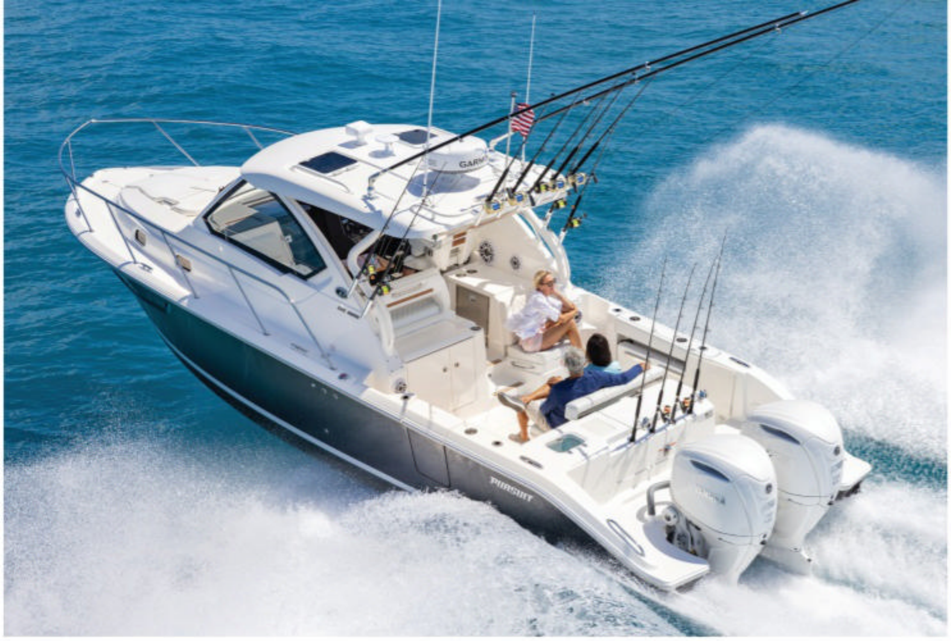


PHOTO: COURTESY PURSUIT BOATS

my!—you weren't expecting 6 feet, 2 inches of headroom (that deadrise really helps here). Forward is a dinette with a high/low table that converts into a full V-berth. Peek aft, and you'll find a 6-foot-2-inch wide berth tucked under the cockpit, which is very comfy (yes, I stretched out) and perfect for a long weekend aboard.

Adding family amenity, the fully enclosed head offers plenty of headroom, plus a sink and shower. Opposite is a mini galley with a microwave and a drawer-style fridge.

Whether you're fishing or relaxing with family, the helm is the heart of the OS 325, and a right fine one it is. First, the skipper gets a folding bolster helm seat with infinite adjustments, and it swivels to face the dining table opposite. Like the other upholstery aboard, the Dri-Fast foam with mesh backing means (pardon me) no wet butts. The dash is user-friendly, and our test boat featured two 16-inch GPSMap 8616 multifunction displays, the Yamaha engine interface, and Siren Marine systems monitoring.

> The folding aft bench on the OS 325 is one of the most comfortable and easy to deploy that we've seen, besides being rugged enough to last over time.

The hardtop features molded locations for the radar (mounted on powder-coated supports), riggers, and a spotlight or a FLIR camera. The optically clear one-piece windshield is impressive, in part because you can wear polarized sunglasses without getting "hotspots." With the side windows extending well aft (augmented with standard side curtains to stretch the enclosure), this is a pilothouse that protects from sun, rain and wind. Need air? Open the electric windshield vent for hot-day cooling. Or, opt for cockpit air conditioning.

Our pair of Yamaha F350 V-6 outboards (300 hp are standard) gave us integrated digital electronic controls and steering, with optional joystick. The dash also sported a joystick for the standard 3 hp Lewmar bow thruster.

As indicated earlier, we topped out at just shy of 53 mph. At 36.4 mph, the OS 325 sipped fuel (26 gph). With the 300-gallon tank, that provided a range beyond 370 miles.

Pursuit is renowned for tough boats with class-leading stowage. The 325 is no exception. It's hand-laminated with blister-thwarting vinylester resins, with a rot-proof foam-filled structural grid of infused glass that adds rigidity. With the hammer down and running in chop, there wasn't a squeak or groan. To carry 700 hp, the transom uses the patented Pursuit Transom Reinforcement Grid. In addition, the hull-to-deck joint is mechanically fastened and through-bolted at all cleats, and the through-hull fittings are bronze. All this is garnished with a five-year hull/deck warranty.

Our test boat had the Fischer Panda 5 kW generator for air conditioning to cool the cabin when away from shore power and, as a bonus, it provides reverse (hot or cold) air conditioning for the skipper and guests in the cockpit.

Underway, a spin of the Brody knob on the stainless-steel wheel provided a banked turn that wouldn't alarm Aunt Edna, even flat out.

Shopping around? Take a look at the Boston Whaler 325 Conquest (32 feet, 3 inches; Merc 300 hp Verados; $515,742).

Thinking back on my day on the OS 325 and reviewing the pictures, I realize that I was wrong. This Pursuit is truly a fine bottle of Louis Roederer Cristal Champagne. There's just nothing we could complain about. —*Capt. Chris Caswell*

High Points

- ▶ Cockpit side door for big fish or bigger divers.
- ▶ Standard 3 hp Lewmar bow thruster.
- ▶ Drawer fridges in cabin and in the cockpit.
- ▶ Great access to electrical, plumbing and battery systems.

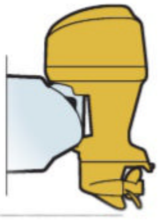
Low Point

- ▶ Aboard our prototype test boat, metal cup holders in the companion lounge bit our spine, but Pursuit has since fixed this.

▪ **LOA:** 34'6" ▪ **BEAM:** 10'10" ▪ **DRAFT (MAX):** 2'9" ▪ **DISPLACEMENT (APPROX.):** 13,740 lb. ▪ **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** 20 degrees ▪ **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 9'3" ▪ **MAX CABIN HEADROOM:** 6'2" ▪ **FUEL CAPACITY:** 300 gal. ▪ **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 700 ▪ **AVAILABLE POWER:** Twin Yamaha 350 hp outboards

Price $557,935
(as tested)

AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD



HOW WE TESTED

ENGINE: Twin Yamaha F350 **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/ Yamaha Saltwater Series II HP, 15¼" x 19" 3-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 1.75:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 250 gal. **WATER ON BOARD:** 10 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 650 lb.

PURSUIT BOATS
Fort Pierce, Florida; pursuitboats.com

BOATING CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	5.5	6.4	1.3	4.2	4.9	1146.0	1318.8	1	66
1500	7.5	8.7	4.5	1.7	1.9	451.0	519.0	2	71
2000	8.9	10.2	7.5	1.2	1.4	319.1	367.2	2	71
2500	10.2	11.7	12.3	0.8	1.0	223.2	256.8	2	81
3000	14.7	16.9	16.0	0.9	1.1	247.8	285.2	3	83
3500	20.3	23.4	20.8	1.0	1.1	264.0	303.8	2	85
4000	31.6	36.4	26.3	1.2	1.4	324.7	373.7	2	85
4500	34.3	39.5	32.1	1.1	1.2	288.7	332.2	2	86
5000	39.0	44.9	44.2	0.9	1.0	238.3	274.3	2	92
5500	43.7	50.3	59.6	0.7	0.8	198.0	227.9	2	94
5800	44.7	52.7	61.6	0.7	0.8	189.0	216.0	2	96

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C

BOATING
CERTIFIED
TEST

#3428

HURRICANE SUNDECK 3200 OB

Hurricane reimagines the traditional deck boat by thinking wide and going deep, and in so doing, positions this new model as a leader in the dayboat category.

PHOTO: COURTESY HURRICANE BOATS

Boating with small children can be a fraught experience. I have a pair of toddler grandchildren, and they sure move fast. There's a low-level hum of anxiety when they are aboard, even though they are buttoned up in their life jackets. For family boating, security is paramount, which is why we think this new Hurricane SunDeck 3200 OB deserves consideration if some of your crew are about knee-high. Which is not to imply that swingin' singles or empty nesters won't also enjoy the SunDeck 3200. It's packed with a lot of great design features.

Hurricane takes a step away from its 50-year-old deck-boat roots with the launch of this wide-beam 32-foot model envisioned as the ultimate dayboat. Squeezing every desirable

SCAN ME

To see a photo gallery of the Hurricane SunDeck 3200 OB, scan this tag or go to boatingmag.com/3428.

PHOTOS: COURTESY HURRICANE BOATS

feature into any boat will always require some give-and-take, but Hurricane has found ways to give us exceptional room for entertaining, lounging, and casual overnighting with minimal compromise. Hurricane also offers good value in this segment. Consider its go-to competitor, a 34-foot-9-inch Sea Ray Sundancer 320 OB—a slightly longer wide-beam, cabin- and hardtop-equipped dayboat with bow seating and outboard power. Base price with twin Mercury Verado 400 outboards is about $507,000. That price includes joystick control—a $25,000 option from Hurricane—but it does not include features such as premium audio, an aft-facing seat at the transom, a windlass, a cabin television and a twin 12-inch MFD, all of which are standard equipment on the SunDeck 3200.

A key design element of the SunDeck 3200 is its high freeboard, measuring about 5 feet, 6 inches from gunwale to waterline. This enables both a very deep bow cockpit and a cabin with 6 feet, 3 inches of headroom. The disadvantage could be added windage and an elevated center of gravity, both of which could make the boat tender and prone to heeling

PHOTO: COURTESY HURRICANE BOATS

in a crosswind. To mitigate this, Hurricane commissioned a hardtop and supports formed of carbon-fiber composite that it claims weighs only 270 pounds.

The thought of kids on a boat came to mind when we walked forward on a passway to port, with 35 inches of depth that is maintained throughout the bow cockpit. Here, there's a three-wide seat that also wraps to starboard around a table, which can be lowered and covered with a matching pad to create an expansive lounge. The very broad bow is squared off and covered with soft Marine-Mat, with two steps to port for easy egress if boarding at the bow from a dock. Compartments in the bow deck can hold 12-inch fenders, and in the center is a hatch over the standard Lewmar windlass.

> The standard JL Audio system sounds spectacular. We counted 12 speakers and two subwoofers distributed around the boat.

If you'd prefer to lounge at the stern, there is a cove-ready swing-back seat at the transom, so you can choose to face the water or join seating in the cockpit that wraps around a table. The table lowers and can be covered to create an aft sun lounge. A galley console to starboard incorporates a wide countertop with a sink and space for an optional grill ($1,244) topping a slide-out 4.5-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer and a drawer designed to hold a 30-quart cooler.

In place of a midcabin, Hurricane chose to create massive stowage below the cockpit sole accessed through a 30-by-30-inch hatch. Close to 4 feet deep, it has space for an optional Seakeeper 2 gyrostabilizer ($41,660), with plenty of room left for all your stuff. There's also excellent access here to well-organized connections for audio components and the C-Zone digital switching network. Batteries and space for an optional 7.5 kW genset are below the aft seat base.

Through a sliding hatch and down three steps to the cabin, you'll find a space with all that headroom and plenty of ambient light. Forward is a settee with a small table that converts to a V-berth that's a good size for those little boaters come nap time. The breaker panel, a small microwave and a 20-liter fridge are at the base of the steps, with an enclosed head across the way.

A double-wide helm seat fronts a dash with a pair of 12-inch Simrad NSX displays. Other helm features include a wireless device charger, a Mercury VesselView screen, a pair of heated/chilled drink holders and an audio remote.

We took the SunDeck 3200 for a spin on Lake Wawasee in Indiana and immediately noted the excellent visibility from the helm because the main support for the hardtop is well behind the captain's line of sight. The V-10 Mercury outboards are designed for thrust, and they did not disappoint, hoisting us on plane in about 7 seconds and charging to 30 mph in 12.2 seconds, with a full load of fuel and five people aboard. The boat handles well but is a little tender in a crosswind and leans into the slightest motion of the wheel. We think that Lenco Pro Control auto tabs ($2,535) to stabilize both pitch and roll would be an ideal option to check on the order form. So, take your kids boating! Just keep their sticky fingers off the Simrad screens. —*Charles Plueddeman*

High Points

- ▶ Designed from the inside out, with cabin headroom as the first priority. The requisite freeboard results in a deep, comfortable bow cockpit, an elevated helm, and cavernous stowage below the sole.
- ▶ Smart to skip a midberth and devote that space to stowage and a Seakeeper.
- ▶ Nice standard features include the hardtop, premium audio, and a pair of 12-inch MFDs.

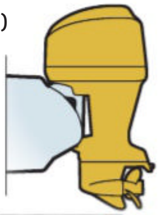
Low Points

- ▶ No gate between the cockpit and the transom platform.
- ▶ No audio remote at the transom or bow seating areas.

· **LOA:** 32'0" · **BEAM:** 10'6" · **DRAFT (MAX):** 3'0" · **DISPLACEMENT (APPROX):** 14,500 lb. · **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** 21 degrees · **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 9'6" · **MAX CABIN HEADROOM:** 6'3" · **WATER CAPACITY:** 30 gal. · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 248 gal. · **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 1,000 · **AVAILABLE POWER:** Twin Mercury, Mercury Racing or Yamaha outboards 300 hp to 450 hp

Price: $418,237
(base with test power)

AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD



HOW WE TESTED

ENGINES: Twin Mercury V-10 Verado 400 outboards **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/18" x 21" Mercury Revolution X 4-blade **GEAR RATIO:** 2.08:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 248 gal. **WATER ON BOARD:** NA **CREW WEIGHT:** 1,000 lb.

HURRICANE BOATS
Elkhart, Indiana; hurricaneboats.com

C
BOATING
CERTIFIED
TEST
RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.9	5.6	3.4	1.4	1.6	319.5	367	1	68
1500	6.7	7.7	5.4	1.2	1.4	276.6	318.9	3	69
2000	8.5	9.8	9.9	0.9	1.0	192.0	220.9	4	73
2500	9.2	10.6	14.5	0.6	0.7	141.8	163.2	5	75
3000	10.3	11.8	17.5	0.6	0.7	130.8	150.5	7	77
3500	12.6	14.5	23.5	0.5	0.6	119.7	137.7	8	80
4000	15.4	17.7	28.5	0.5	0.6	120.5	138.6	9	82
4500	25.9	29.8	33.2	0.8	0.9	174.1	200.3	7	85
5000	34.8	40.0	40.7	0.9	1.0	190.6	219.4	6	86
5500	39.3	45.2	52.6	0.7	0.9	166.7	191.8	5	86
6000	44.8	51.5	65.6	0.7	0.8	152.3	175.2	4	93

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

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NAVnet

TZ touch XL

YAMAHA
SOLARA

SCAN ME

To see a photo gallery of the Solara S-310 SC, scan this tag or visit boatingmag.com/3429.

Multipurpose crossover boats are enjoying their time in the sun, mixing sporty performance with the ability to do everything from fishing, diving, and towing watersports to cruising, entertaining, and even comfortably overnighting. Some boats drop a ball in this juggling act, but Solara's 310 Sport Coupe pulls it off with aplomb. Credit in part goes to one of the longest lists of high-value standards that we've seen in this size range, but also to the fact that Solara designers and engineers appear to be true boating enthusiasts themselves. They're designing a boat for how they, and their buyers, use one. That the builder does all of the above while keeping the price as low as it is might

PHOTO: TOM KING

BOATING CERTIFIED TEST

#3429

SOLARA
S-310 SC

This dayboat offers a long list of standard features that most boaters want at a competitive price, making it a compelling, easy-to-buy choice.

PHOTOS: COURTESY SOLARA BOATS

come with a few trade-offs here and there, but the result is simple: good old-fashioned bang for the buck.

Examples abound on the 310. Step aboard via the Clear Path EVA-covered swim platform, and you'll instantly note that it's completely free of obstructions, the result of Solara working with engine partner Yamaha to place all that toe-catching, space-clogging rigging underneath the deck. Step inside the cockpit, and a plethora of comfortably padded benches are ready for however you've planned your day. Grab some cold ones from the fridge and socialize while your meal is prepped on the nearby electric grill. Or if you prefer to catch your meal first, fold seats into the wall and clear the decks for fishing. Multiple rod holders line the gunwales, and a livewell awaits to starboard. Extra kudos are reserved for the split-personality aft bench. It morphs from a fishing-friendly fiberglass transom wall into a cove-friendly, aft-facing perch open to the swim platform or forward-facing bench that extends over that same platform so as to steal nary an inch of cockpit space.

Below the hardtop, a large portside lounge borders the aft cockpit and features a flip-flop backrest to join either social scene. Forward, the swiveling companion seat likewise does double-duty depending on the occupant's focus. A pedestal table allows all of the above's occupants to gather round. Opposite, a starboard galley awaits, with an electric refrigerator/freezer, a stainless-steel sink, much-appreciated prep space, and five storage drawers. The latter are more practical to access and organize compared with the jumble often created by wide-open hatch-accessed storage. There's even dedicated space for wine bottles and glasses.

Forward of the galley, the impressively appointed helm completes the covered space. Featuring eye-catching red carbon-fiber accent panels, its true highlight is an array of four touchscreens, including a pair of Garmin GPSMap 8612 multifunction displays that practically surround the driver with visual information. Cool tweak? The entire assembly angles up or down at the touch of a button, repositioning displays to compensate for driver height, standing or seated position at the helm, and to reduce glare.

> Step aboard via the Clear Path EVA-covered swim platform, and you'll instantly note that it's free of obstructions.

Equal thought has been put into the forward cabin. Taller occupants will instantly appreciate the 6-foot-4-inch headroom in both cabin and head compartment. The latter includes a pump-out marine toilet, hot-water shower, and upscale glass sink bowl. Rather than a storage compartment masquerading as a V-berth, the former proved both spacious enough (and mattress comfortable enough) to actually spend that aforementioned overnight. Natural light is funneled in via an overhead skylight and a clear acrylic hatch. The hatch also opens for natural ventilation.

Back topside, a deep and comfy bow cockpit completes the tour. In order to maximize protected space under the hardtop, it's accessed via an internal, weather-protected walk-through to port. Step out and find a double-wide couch facing forward and twin lounges to port and starboard, all generously padded and with stainless-steel grab handles within reach. Add a pedestal table or toss in the filler cushions to make one large sun bed. Cup holders, Fusion stereo head unit, speakers, and USB charging ports are likewise close at hand.

Features and value aside, it's the ride that can ultimately make or break a boat's success. The 310 runs on a double-stepped hull with a progressive variable deadrise that competently handled our test day's rough conditions. Laminar flow interrupters—golf-ball-like dimples positioned near the bow—aim to improve cornering ability by breaking up surface tension. Auto-leveling trim tabs and a Lewmar bow thruster enhance high- and low-speed handling, respectively, and were greatly appreciated on our blustery test day. The 310's pair of Yamaha 300s also proved their worth in the challenging conditions, pushing the 310 onto plane in 5.6 seconds, passing 30 mph in 7.4, and topping out at 52.8 mph.

Comparison shopping? Regal's 33 SAV (starting at $545,730 well-equipped, with Yamaha 300s) is likely closest in concept but is several feet longer, allowing Regal to add a midcabin berth. The price reflects this difference, however, and options hike it up further. Pursuit's DC 306 ($418,156, with twin Yamaha 300s) starts closer in price and targets a similar audience, but its dual-console design makes it more of a pure dayboat. And again, options increase the bottom line. Both models are also more upscale than the Solara and feature superior fit-and-finish. Solara definitely runs up the score, however, on standard features. Proof? Every feature mentioned in this review is standard. Bang on, Solara. —*Jeff Hemmel*

High Points

- ▶ Hardtop-mounted cameras forward and aft prove helpful in tight docking situations or when picking up skiers or riders.
- ▶ When anchored out, efficient air conditioning and reverse-cycle heat can run on lithium house batteries, recharged quickly via the Yamaha outboards' 70-amp alternators.
- ▶ Additional high-value standards include anchor windlass, bow thruster, Fusion stereo with subwoofer, flat-screen TV, and autopilot.

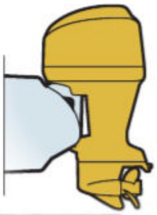
Low Points

- ▶ At planing speeds, we recorded higher noise levels than aboard similar boats.
- ▶ We noted excess caulking and gaps between several adjoining panels.

- **LOA:** 30'10" - **BEAM:** 10'0" - **DRAFT (MAX):** 2'9"
- **DISPLACEMENT:** 10,500 lb. - **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 9'11"
- **FUEL CAPACITY:** 200 gal. - **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 600
- **AVAILABLE POWER:** Twin Yamaha 300 hp outboards

Price: $379,937
(with test power)

AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD



HOW WE TESTED

ENGINE: Yamaha F300 **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Yamaha Saltwater Series II 15¼" x 18" 3-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 1.75:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 100 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 340 lb.

SOLARA BOATS
Auburn, Washington; solaraboats.com

C

BOATING
CERTIFIED
TEST
RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.7	5.4	2.9	1.6	1.9	291.3	335.2	0	62
1500	6.3	7.2	4.2	1.5	1.7	268.1	308.6	1	69
2000	7.5	8.6	7.4	1.0	1.2	181.8	209.2	3	73
2500	10.0	11.5	11.5	0.9	1.0	156.4	180.0	7	79
3000	13.5	15.5	13.5	1.0	1.1	179.6	206.7	7	84
3500	18.0	20.7	17.0	1.1	1.2	190.5	219.2	7	86
4000	29.8	34.3	23.2	1.3	1.5	231.3	266.1	5	86
4500	33.9	39.0	28.5	1.2	1.4	214.0	246.3	5	88
5000	31.6	38.2	34.6	1.1	1.3	198.0	227.9	4	91
5500	43.4	50.0	49.0	0.9	1.0	159.6	183.7	4	93
6000	45.9	52.8	53.5	0.9	1.0	154.4	177.6	4	95

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

PHOTO: TOM KING

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TESTS

#3430

SESSA C44

From the land of Ferrari, it's no surprise that the new Sessa C44 pops onto plane in just 8 seconds flat and, pushed by a pair of Volvo Penta D6 diesel IPS 600s, this stylish cruiser tops out at over 35 mph. Not bad for moving 14 tons of Italian luxury.

The Sessa C44 is a lean express cruiser, accented by a slash of windows in the topsides, but one of its surprises is that we found as much as 6 feet, 9 inches of headroom inside its cabin.

If you are a buyer appreciative of this boat's style and performance, you will want to consider your boating usage because Sessa offers the C44 in your choice of two cockpit layouts. The extended cockpit version (for entertaining many) gives you two swoopy dinettes, protected by both the hardtop (with opening moonroof) and a sliding shade aft, while the standard layout offers a wide sun pad (no second dinette) with a spacious tender garage underneath. Both versions have a standard hydraulic swim platform that can handle up to a 900-pound tender or PWC, and the tender garage will conceal and protect a small boat up 7 feet, 6 inches in length. The skipper is cosseted in a bolstered helm seat, facing a Euro-styled dash with Raymarine Axiom GPS and Volvo Penta engine monitor. Just abaft the helm is an outdoor galley with a grill, sink and drawer-style refrigerator.

Step below into the lower salon, and you'll find a large convertible dinette to starboard opposite a full galley with a four-burner Kenyon ceramic cooktop, microwave/convection oven, fridge, and lacquered eye-level cabinetry.

The owner's cabin is lush, with an angled queen berth that allows you to walk on each side (to keep your dignity intact while climbing in or out), plus a leather-topped bureau, full-height hanging locker, and enough stowage shelves and drawers for long weekends. The en suite head features a stall shower with Lucite doors.

Forward, the guest cabin sports scissoring single berths that combine into a double, as well as private access to the day head with its curtained shower.

Sessa, a three-generation family builder, might be a new name for some skippers on this side of the pond, but the C44 will add it to their vocabulary. —*Chris Caswell*

To see a photo gallery of the Sessa C44, visit boatingmag.com/3430.

MORE ONLINE

High Points

- ▶ Sessa's North American team has a warehouse filled with parts, as well as a service team for nationwide support.
- ▶ A tender garage? Yes! Opt for one of its two layouts, and Sessa C44 offers a garage on the transom, just like a dinghy garage on a large yacht. This can house a dinghy up to 7 feet, 6 inches long with an outboard.
- ▶ The choice of two different layouts allows buyers to tailor this new Sessa to their specific needs.
- ▶ A third outdoor galley is hidden in the transom, with a grill, a refrigerator and a sink.

Low Points

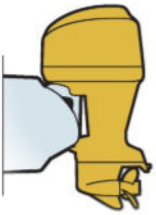
- ▶ The two fuel tanks, totaling 252 gallons, carry less fuel than competing-model boats, and crimp the range, allowing just over 200 miles at 26 mph.
- ▶ The helm seat is on the narrow side for two people, and the absence of a seat opposite the helm means a companion must join the skipper.

Toughest Competitor

- ▶ The Galeon 450 HTC ($1,198,515) is similarly sized, with Volvo Penta V-drive diesels and either two- or three-cabin layouts. No transom garage, but it does offer foldout side decks.

· **LOA:** 45' 5" · **BEAM:** 13'1" · **DRAFT (MAX):** 3'4" · **DISPLACEMENT (APPROX.):** 27,557 lb. · **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** NA · **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 17'5" · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 253.6 gal. · **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 440 · **AVAILABLE POWER:** Volvo IPS to 440 hp

Price: $1,032,000



AVAILABLE POWER:

OUTBOARD

HOW WE TESTED

ENGINE: Twin Volvo Penta D6 diesel IPS 600 (440 hp)

DRIVE/PROP: IPS pod/Twin 3- and 4-blade counter-rotating nibral T6 **GEAR RATIO:** 1.82:1

FUEL LOAD: 175 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 650 lb.

SESSA MARINE
Aventura, Florida; 305-807-2260; sessamarine.us

C

BOATING

CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	6.26	7.20	1.00	6.26	7.20	1425	1639	0	66
1500	6.00	8.15	3.20	1.90	2.50	433	569	4	71
2000	8.52	9.80	8.00	1.06	1.23	242	279	3	71
2500	16.08	18.50	12.00	1.34	1.54	305	351	2	76
3000	22.68	26.10	22.00	1.03	1.19	235	270	2	79
3500	30.85	35.50	30.00	1.03	1.18	234	269	2	85

PHOTO: COURTESY SESSA MARINE

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ROBALO R257

Robalo Boats are tough and stylish, offering optimal deck space for crew as well as top-shelf production quality at a modest price. The R257 dual-console punches above its class in performance, fishability and comfort.

The R257 proves a seriously fishable saltwater SUV that's ready for diving, snorkeling, cruising and beachcombing—and, yes, it offers some luxury too.

The R257's ride is smooth thanks to its deep, wave-cleaving deadrise. Well-positioned chines aid in crisp turns, and available Helm Master joystick steering makes mooring easy. The full-maneuverability joystick system holds the boat when waiting for your turn at the fuel dock too.

A wraparound windshield and a walk-through wind dam protect the cockpit from the elements. Wraparound bow seating is deep and safe, providing comfortable bolsters and rails all the way around. Standard silicone fabric upholstery is inherently UV- and mildew-resistant, supple, cool to the touch, and stain-repellent. We love the look of the multiple textures and colors, complementary to any of the almost infinite color schemes available. The premium upholstery makes the custom captain's chair even more luxurious and cool to the touch, and the bolster gives a better view when docking.

For the No. 1 companion, a portside convertible lounge has a backrest that adjusts to form a single forward-facing seat with a back-to-back aft-facing seat. Flip the backrest forward for an aft-facing lounge. Behind the captain's bucket seat is an entertainment galley with sink and pullout shower. A fold-away transom seat adds comfortable seating on the fly.

For anglers, there's a 30-gallon livewell with a high-capacity pump that will keep hundreds of baits alive all day. Rod holders surround the cockpit, with six on transom, one on each gunwale and six in the hardtop to keep extra rods ready. Two 50-gallon fish boxes under the deck are macerated, and pulling your catch into them will be easy through either the transom door or the portside boarding door.

The Robalo R257 is hardcore fishable, with durable crew-pampering features and reliable outboard power. *—Randy Vance*

To watch our video review of the Robalo R257, visit boatingmag.com/3431. **MORE ONLINE**

High Points

- ▶ Optional Lenco Pro Control trim tabs automatically adjust for a smooth, level ride.
- ▶ The transom seat adds seating while still leaving space for a transom door.
- ▶ Standard hardtop includes six rod holders, dual storage boxes, LED spreader lights, tricolor overhead LED lights, four speakers, outrigger-ready mounts, and a ski tow point.

Low Points

- ▶ More tackle storage would be useful but would come at the expense of seating or the deck galley.
- ▶ The 9-foot-2-inch beam makes a permit necessary for trailering in some states.

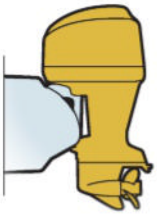
Toughest Competitor

- ▶ Blackfin does a good job of blending style, comfort and fishability in its 252 DC ($230,760 with twin 200 hp Mercury outboards in white). It is available with Mercury outboards in twin 150 or 200, or single 300 to 400 models.

· **LOA:** 25'3" · **BEAM:** 9'2" · **DRAFT:** 2'11" · **DISPLACEMENT:** 7,000 lb. (dry with power) · **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** 23 degrees · **BRIDGE CLEARANCE:** 8'11" (with outriggers) · **MAX HEADROOM:** 3'11" · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 165 gal. · **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 400 · **AVAILABLE POWER:** Single or twin Yamaha outboards to 400 hp

Price: $195,712 (as tested with twin 200 Yamahas)

AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD



HOW WE TESTED

ENGINES: Twin Yamaha 200 hp outboards **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Reliance 14.25" x 18" 3-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 1.75:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 100 gal. **WATER ON BOARD:** 0 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 700 lb.

ROBALO BOATS
Nashville, Georgia; robalo.com

C
BOATING
CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.4	5.1	1.6	2.8	3.2	411.3	473.3	0	63
1500	6.1	7.1	2.8	2.2	2.5	324.9	373.9	1	68
2000	7.5	8.6	4.4	1.7	2.0	252.2	290.3	2	70
2500	8.5	9.8	7.1	1.2	1.4	177.2	203.9	5	74
3000	11.9	13.8	9.5	1.3	1.4	186.8	214.9	8	80
3500	21.1	24.3	12.5	1.7	1.9	250.9	288.7	5	84
4000	26.5	30.5	15.5	1.7	2.0	253.5	291.7	5	87
4500	30.7	35.4	20.0	1.5	1.8	228.1	262.5	3	89
5000	34.9	40.2	27.4	1.3	1.5	189.1	217.6	4	91
5500	39.0	44.9	35.7	1.1	1.3	162.3	186.8	4	92
6000	42.4	48.8	40.6	1.0	1.2	155.1	178.5	4	93

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

PHOTO: COURTESY ROBALO BOATS

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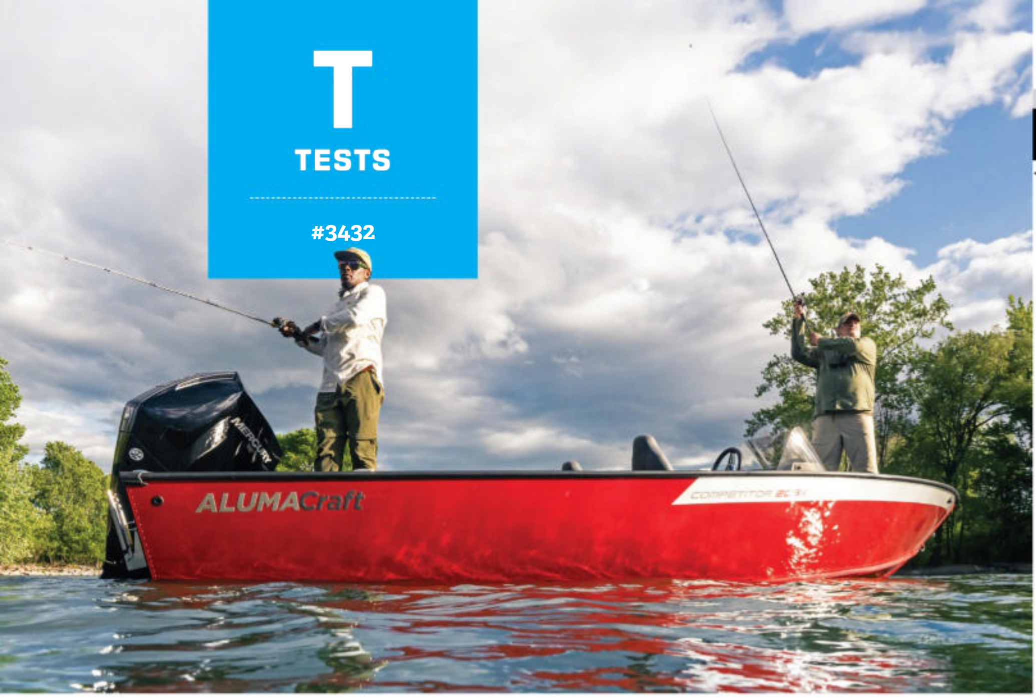


ALUMACRAFT
Competitor 205X SC

Room is always at a premium on angling boats. For 2025, the Alumacraft Competitor line of aluminum multispecies boats offers a clever idea that expands the aft casting deck without compromising cockpit space or making the boat longer. The X-Pods on either side of the outboard extend the aft deck by 16 inches. This gives the angler more foot room and makes it easier to fish around the motor. Each X-Pod also incorporates stowage space. The X-Pods are not an extension of the running surface but do act as fixed tabs to improve planing performance and handling in turns. The X-Pods are a feature of 12 new Competitor models, including the 22-foot-2-inch-long 205X Side Console we tested.

Competitor models also feature a new bow control center with a recessed well for the trolling-motor pedal, a phone holder with a USB port, and fishing-tool slots. The center panel is designed for gimble or recessed mounting of a display up to 12 inches. A handsome new molded dash area at the helm features a standard 7-inch Garmin EchoMap MFD for instrumentation, with room for two 12-inch graphs above the dashboard.

The bow livewell holds 21 gallons. A choice of three new Flex Module configurations is offered for the aft cockpit: the Flex 29 with a carpeted bench/step and a 29-gallon livewell, the Flex FSX with a pair of jump seats flanking a 30-gallon livewell, and the Flex 50 with a 50-gallon livewell. Full-length 13-inch-wide steps in the cockpit port and starboard make it easy to kneel and reach the water. The tops lift to reach stowage and the 46-quart cooler to starboard and 10-foot rod stowage to port. There's additional rod stowage below the forward deck.

Alumacraft has not changed the revered Competitor running surface, which is slightly concave from keel to chine to help the boat better carve turns. The Alumacraft 2XB double-plated hull with a seamless one-piece bottom is designed to be durable and feel solid on the water. The Competitor 205X is rated for up to 400 hp, but the 250 hp Mercury on our test boat provided satisfying performance, hopping on plane in less than 4 seconds and holding plane at just 17.5 mph—ideal performance when the water is rough. —*Charles Plueddeman*

To see our performance video review of the Alumacraft Competitor 205X SC, go to boatingmag.com/3432. **MORE ONLINE**

High Points

- X-Pods expand the aft deck, making it easier to fish around the outboard motor.
- The 48-gallon fuel tank wraps around a house and cranking battery below the aft deck, moving battery weight forward for improved boat balance.
- Three Flex aft livewell options permit customization for your fishing activity.
- Bow control center offers flexible mounting options for up to a 12-inch display, with space for two more 12-inch displays at the helm.

Low Points

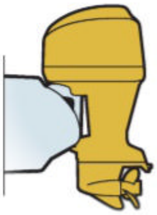
- Competitive boats come with a standard trailer, while this one does not.
- Innovative Rotax S outboard and Max Deck is not an option for this model.

Toughest Competitor

- The 21-foot-2-inch G3 Angler V21F (about $70,000 with a Yamaha F250 and EZ Loader trailer) is offered only as a dual-console with full windshield, with room for a single display above the dash and traditional analog instruments, and does not have a bow console for electronics. The optional Flip Deck ($688) expands the aft casting area and incorporates jump seats.

· **LOA:** 22'2" · **BEAM:** 8'2" · **DRAFT:** NA · **DISPLACEMENT:** 2,003 lb. · **TRANSOM DEADRISE:** 17 degrees · **FUEL CAPACITY:** 48 gal. · **MAX HORSEPOWER:** 400 · **AVAILABLE POWER:** Single Honda, Mercury, Suzuki or Yamaha outboard; 150 to 400 hp

Price: $66,367
(base MSRP with test power)



AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD

HOW WE TESTED

ENGINE: Mercury FourStroke 250 DTS **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Mercury Enertia 14.2" x 21" 3-blade stainless steel **GEAR RATIO:** 1.85:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 48 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 380 lb.

ALUMACRAFT BOATS
St. Peter, Minnesota; alumacraft.com

C
BOATING
CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.6	5.3	1.3	3.5	4.1	153.0	176.123	0	63
1500	6.0	6.9	2.0	3.0	3.5	129.5	149.04	1	68
2000	9.0	10.4	3.0	3.0	3.5	130.1	149.8	3	69
2500	14.8	17.0	3.6	4.1	4.7	177.3	204.0	6	76
3000	20.9	24.0	4.6	4.5	5.2	195.9	225.4	4	77
3500	27.1	31.2	6.5	4.2	4.8	180.2	207.4	3	80
4000	32.0	36.8	8.8	3.6	4.2	157.0	180.7	2	85
4500	33.9	39.0	11.0	3.1	3.5	133.1	153.2	2	87
5000	38.0	43.7	13.7	2.8	3.2	119.7	137.8	2	88
5500	42.4	48.8	18.3	2.3	2.7	100.1	115.2	2	90
5950	48.8	56.2	21.8	2.2	2.6	96.7	111.3	2	95

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED

PHOTO: COURTESY ALUMACRAFT BOATS

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MONTEREY
ELITE 30

SCAN ME

To learn more about the Monterey Elite 30 and past Boats of the Year, scan this tag or visit boatingmag.com/boat-of-the-year.

BOATING
2024
BOAT OF THE YEAR
MERCURY
MERCURY
MONTEREY

PHOTO: FLORIDA FILM & TAPE / CLAYTON DODWELL

Boating's Boat of the Year (BOTY) stands as the most prestigious award in recreational boating. Why? There are many reasons, including the decades-long history of editorial objectivity used to select the BOTY. Boatbuilders do not pay to be considered for the award, nor do advertising dollars sway our Tech Team's decision. The record stands for itself: Non-advertisers, and those who advertise very little, have both earned the honor of Boat of the Year.

What, then, is the BOTY criteria?

First, it must be a boat we have tested in the preceding year. It must also meet or exceed all ABYC, NMMA, and other industry standards and regulations. The determining factor, though, is that the boat must excel in its category more than any other boat stands out in any other category. Often, and again the record bears this out, the BOTY is copied and sets a trend, advancing the state of the sport.

For 2024, we chose Monterey's Elite 30 as BOTY by virtue of its layout. It's the result of a new way of seeing boat design—melding the best features of a dual-console, a center-console and a bowrider. In doing so, it changes the way we think about and use boats. Congratulations, Monterey! —*Kevin Falvey*

VERADO
MERCURY
AMS

WEEKEND WARRIOR

We overnight on the Beneteau Antares 8 to celebrate the return of the pocket cruiser.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CRAIG KOTILINEK

ANTARES 8

It sounds idyllic, right? You're going to go overnight on a mini yacht (my words, not theirs) and gallivant around Florida's Sarasota Bay on a beautiful summer day. That's how I sold it to my wife, at least. See, if you're not familiar with a pocket cruiser, it generally means a cabin boat under 30 feet length overall designed for boating in favorable, nearshore conditions. Many pocket cruisers prove small enough to trailer as well, which is a huge benefit for those of us who like to consistently see new ports of call. Now, for all you seasoned cruisers out there, you can probably already see where this story gets interesting. At 26 feet, 5 inches with just over a 9-foot beam, the Beneteau Antares 8 is on the small side for overnighting. This is why I led with the "mini yacht" yarn when I was selling this adventure to my wife. I needed someone to photograph for the story, and I needed her to say yes without overthinking it. So, after she overthought it for quite some time, she acquiesced, and we were off to Sarasota Bay.

When we first walked onto the docks, we had trouble spotting the Antares 8—until we realized it was tucked behind an Antares 11. Ten feet longer, the Antares 11 looks like a completely different class of boat. After dragging my wife away from that one, we boarded the Antares 8 and were immediately impressed.

The term "pocket cruiser" is an old one, referring to a cruiser small enough to fit in a vest pocket. Twenty years ago, pocket cruisers were a mainstay of boating, with plenty of boatbuilders providing trailerable cruising boats to a willing populace. Then, they fell out of favor. Now,

After my wife cast lines, it was a breeze to get past an Antares 11 docked nearby, wipe up the drool, and ease on out into Sarasota Bay.

Beneteau aims to bring back pocket cruisers with the Antares 8. We set out to learn how and why.

IN THE POCKET

My wife and I personally own a classic Mako of about the same length as the Antares 8, and we had been wracking our brains over how Beneteau would fit cruising amenities on the same footprint. The answer, of course, is a very deliberate layout.

The pilothouse-style design balances the deck space in thirds, with equal attention given to each. The aft third is all about angling; the Antares 8 we weekended aboard came equipped with the fishing package. Multiple rod holders, tackle stowage, and plenty of casting room allow this pocket cruiser to actually fish. The middle third is all about the pilothouse, with a fully enclosed salon complete with air conditioning (more on that later), below-deck sleeping quarters, a convertible seating/dining area, fridge and even a cooktop. I was amazed that Beneteau was able to pack so much into this size boat. The forward quarter is for the sundeck, bow rails, and anchor locker with a windlass.

After we settled in, I started to explore the helm. Some of the higher-end features on the Antares were blowing my mind. A bow thruster? Now I really did feel like I was on a mini yacht. With a single engine on a 26-plus-foot cabin boat, things can get a little hairy when you've got a tight docking situation, especially when you throw in a current and some wind. The Antares 8 proved an easy boat to handle dockside, though, especially with the thruster as an extra tool to use if needed.

Wanting to see how the Antares 8 handled sporty conditions, we made our way to the mouth of the inlet. It was a fairly windy day with a consistent west wind, so there was plenty of fetch to create some small waves to play around in. It's not a dedicated offshore boat, yet the Beneteau handled the conditions admirably. And the best part was, my wife and I stayed completely dry while we gawked at the high-dollar homes along the mouth of the inlet.

ANCHORS AWEIGH

While it was fun to test this new boat's mettle, it wasn't part of the assignment, so my personal indulgence had to come to an end. Besides being off mission, we were feeling hot. This wasn't a 60-foot yacht with an oversize AC and a generator. This boat's battery-powered AC struggled against midday summer heat. And with two small cabin windows, the AC was still the better option than the breeze. It was time to beat the heat the old-fashioned way: by beelining it to the nearest sandbar. Can't do that in a 60-footer.

MERCURY
ANTARES 8

Not being used to the conveniences of a modern boat, I sent my wife up to the bow when we reached the sandbar. I assumed that at the very least she would be letting down the anchor from the remote at the locker while I backed down to set the anchor. Instead, I realized that the anchor windlass was entirely controllable from the helm, something that blew my classic-boat mind and made single-handing the Antares 8 an absolute dream. I could drop the anchor and back down on it right from the helm. This was living!

When we were set, my wife hit the mini fridge for a libation as we settled into a bluebird Florida sandbar afternoon. We met some very nice Kentuckians who came ripping in on a Freedom Boat Club pontoon and were discussing having some more "Cuban Sushi" that night.

"Cuban Sushi?" the wife asked.

"Yes," the husband answered, "the stuff with the fish and the peppers and all that."

"Oh, you mean ceviche! We can get some more of that," the wife said.

True story. And forevermore in our household, "ceviche" and "Cuban Sushi" will be interchangeable terms. Funny how quickly life changes like that.

Shortly after, another boat showed up with the most aquatic Labrador I had ever seen. It was just deep enough that the dog couldn't stand, so it swam from person to person, patrolling the area.

DINE AND DOZE

After a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon full of socializing, snorkeling and soaking in the Gulf waters, we said our goodbyes, I weighed anchor (from the helm, what luxury!), and we were on our way. We had a dinner date at an on-water restaurant in the bay. But first, a quick cleating lesson was in order.

Growing up a farmer's daughter in South Georgia, my wife doesn't have as much experience boating as I do. When we take our Mako to the Bahamas, we always have a crew full of friends who are seasoned boaters, so the guys are always the dock crew. In this case, we were a crew of two, so I needed my wife to learn to cleat off lines in a hurry. I taught her "the right way" as I had been taught from one of my sailing uncles, and we soon found ourselves the sole vessel in front of a fully occupied on-water restaurant with a strong current running and a crosswind. It was a high-pressure situation for my wife. She's wound tight as it is, so the restaurant gawkers didn't make things any easier for us. Luckily, I had my secret weapon: the bow thruster. We threw out our fenders, doubled back to go in nose first, then let the current nestle us in perfectly on the port side. My wife tied off a couple of perfect cleats,

ESSENTIALS FOR OVERNIGHTING ON A SMALL BOAT

If you're expecting a stately king-size bed or a stand-up shower from a pocket cruiser, you're going to be disappointed. It's essential to recognize a boat's strengths and weaknesses so that you can set your expectations.

For example, consider bringing an air mattress. The "bed" that you're going to be sleeping on is just a converted cushion, and "high-density marine-grade foam" is a far cry from a mattress and box spring. Recognizing that it might not be your best night's sleep, bring all the essentials to make coffee in the morning. My wife brought her French press and made home-quality coffee on the Antares 8's small cooktop. You're also going to want to bring toiletries because smaller boats tend to have freshwater washdowns rather than enclosed showers. Bring linens or a sleeping bag, and an overstuffed pillow to accommodate the lack of give in the cushions if you're going sans blowup mattress, and be prepared for the AC to freeze you out when it catches up.

We dined at on-water restaurants, but you'll want to pack light prepared meals if your destination is more remote, which I think it should be. This boat's real strength is in its ability to get into tight anchorages and get you off the grid in search of some adventure, so bringing a few essentials and finding some secluded mooring buoy to overnight should be on the to-do list of any Beneteau Antares 8 owner.

and we were strolling down the docks to dinner, cool as cucumbers. The gawkers were desperately disappointed not to see a Qualified Captain moment.

Fortunately, the restaurant manager sat us at a table right in front of the Antares 8. Perfect for capturing some golden-hour views of the boat and relaxing with a coastal dinner. When we were just about finished, I went to the boat and turned on the air conditioning, which bothered absolutely no one because it doesn't make any sound. By the time we were wrapping up dinner, the sun was low and the temperature was comfortable inside the cabin, with the AC humming along on enough battery power to get us back to port.

We hooked back up to shore power at the dock, grabbed a shower at the hotel marina, and settled in for the night. How was the sleep? I'll say this. You can't expect your best night's sleep on a pocket cruiser, but you also can't expect any of the adventure of overnighting on a small boat without a little discomfort. We would do it again in a heartbeat, especially to the Bahamas, where the Antares 8's shallow draft would allow for endless exploration of secluded coves and beaches. That would give us the opportunity to kick back, drop a line, reel in a big one, and make some fresh Cuban Sushi right on deck.

> When we were just about finished, I went to the boat and turned on the air conditioning, which bothered absolutely no one because it doesn't make any sound.

HEAVY-METAL MEMORIES

Crossing Lake Michigan in a 22-foot Bentley shows just how far pontoon boats have come.

BY CHARLES PLUEDDEMAN

NC 3191 EX
25

The young man attending the gas dock in Frankfort, Michigan, seemed befuddled.

"So you just crossed Lake Michigan on a pontoon boat," he said. "Why would you do that?"

I thought about this for a moment and just shrugged. "I don't know. I guess because it's a nice day."

The kid slipped the nozzle into our fuel fill and switched on the pump. He stood back and looked us over some more: three guys on the far side of middle age and a 22-foot pontoon.

"So now what are you going to do?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "I guess gas up and go back to Wisconsin. It's still a nice day."

This little adventure was a goofy idea. Quite literally. The instigator was our friend Malcolm "Goofy" Sohm, a pontoonist of the highest order, who invited us to join him on this over-and-back. The voyage was a reprise of the same crossing Goofy made in 1999. Twenty-five years ago, Sohm crossed the pond as a publicity stunt to promote his recently patented invention, the T.A.P. Fin System, the first lifting device devised to improve pontoon performance. That trip made for a great story but not much publicity. This time, Sohm made sure to invite a couple of magazine writers to share the tale.

PHOTO: TOM KING

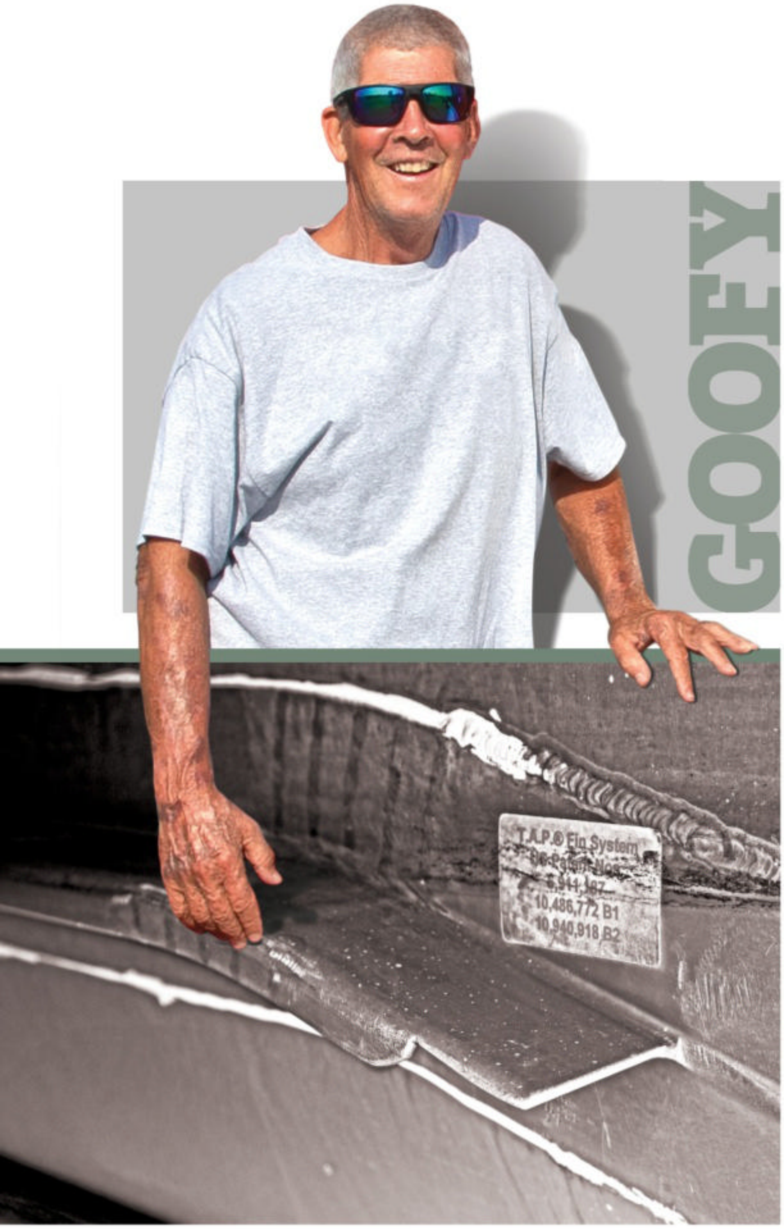
THE ACCIDENTAL PONTOONIST

The story of Goofy Sohm and the T.A.P. Fin has appeared on these pages in the past, in abbreviated fashion. This time I'll include all the details and tell a tale of one man's inquisitive mind and unrelenting determination in pursuit of a goal that has, so far, been elusive.

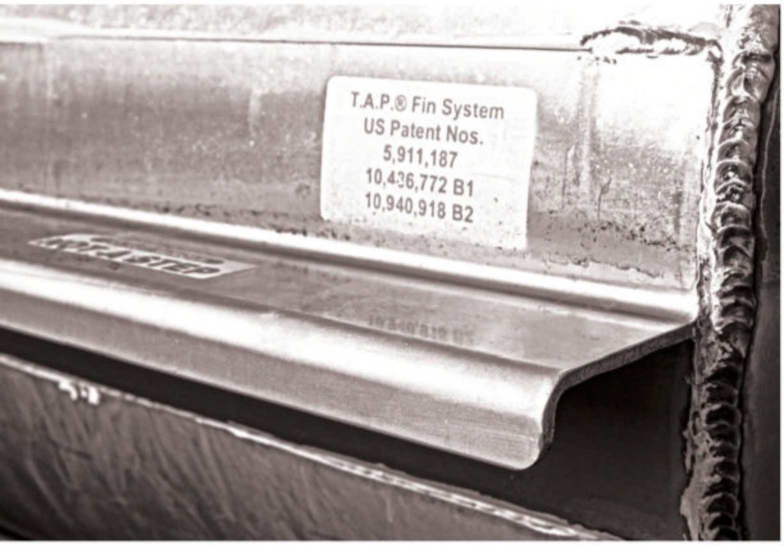
Sohm, who is about to turn 70 years old, grew up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where his father owned a filling station and was an avid boater.

"My early childhood was like a chapter out of Huck Finn," Sohm says. "We had a paddle-wheel houseboat. It was 42 feet long and 16 feet wide, with a wood hull we had to caulk up each spring. We used that boat to roam all over the Winnebago basin. It would take us two days to run 20 miles from Oshkosh up the Fox River to Eureka. But what a grand time! Fishing and swimming and sleeping on the roof with the stars overhead."

Sohm earned his nickname in high school. On a dare, he rode his minibike one lap around the main hallway of Oshkosh West High School but crashed on the slick terrazzo right in front of the principal's office. "What a goofy thing to do!" Mr. Rahn said as Sohm lay on the floor. There you go. Sohm embraced his moniker, which perfectly fits his personality.



WHO ARE YOU CALLING GOOFY? Inventor Malcolm "Goofy" Sohm holds patents for the SSG (Super Sport Goofy) system for triple-tube pontoon boats (above) and his original T.A.P. Fin System (below).



Fast-forward a few decades. Sohm lost his fiberglass speedboat in a divorce. After he later married Terry Reiter, in 1989, the couple lived south of Oshkosh, across the road from Lake Winnebago, where Goofy had a one-man auto-body repair business. "After the divorce, all I could afford was a 21-foot Crest pontoon with a 25-horse Evinrude," Sohm said. "I could not keep up with my buddies. I kept putting a bigger outboard on that pontoon, but my best friend had a 34 Scarab. When Lake Winnebago got rough, I was miserable."

Sohm started wondering if there was a better way to improve the performance of his pontoon. One day, he had Terry drive while he lay on the forward deck, his head hanging over so that he could look below the boat.

"All this water was just flying up off the tubes and hitting the underside of the deck," Sohm said, "and I thought, *What a waste of energy. What if I could redirect that force?* This was also after a pontoon with a 15 hp motor got caught in a thunderstorm on Lake Winnebago, and six people drowned. They couldn't get off the lake fast enough when the storm popped up."

TAPPING INTO PERFORMANCE

In a move that now seems prescient, Sohm in 1996 commissioned the construction of a custom pontoon. Twenty-six feet long and supported by a pair of 26-inch-diameter tubes, the boat was bigger than any production pontoon on the market at the time. The tubes were formed in two pieces by a local sheet-metal shop and welded together lengthwise. That seam also incorporated wide inner and outer flanges.

"It seemed obvious that I could use fins to capture the force of the water coming off the tubes," Sohm said. "The tubes came with the strip of aluminum sticking straight out on both sides, and I welded two Vise-Grips together so that I could bend 6 inches at a time and just work my way down the tube. I started with a 45-degree lip, and then tried 90 degrees, and then more than 90 degrees. The 90-degree bend worked the best. I had no education and no money, but I had an invention."

> **All this water was just flying up off the tubes and hitting the underside of the deck, and I thought, *What a waste of energy. What if I could redirect that force?***

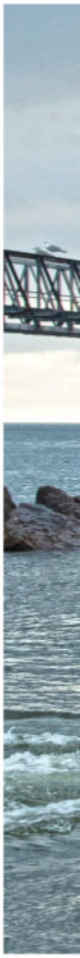
Sohm finished the deck himself using off-the-shelf pontoon furniture bolted onto a 200 hp Mercury outboard, and in 1998, he took his prototype to the *Pontoon and Deck Boat* magazine shootout on Lake Dora, Florida.

"My goal was to demonstrate the concept and sell it to Smoker or Bennington," Sohms said. "But the performance was disappointing. The boat ran only 31 mph. So I called my buddy John Litjens, who ran the Mercury Lake X test facility at the time, and he told me to bring the boat over."

Litjens set up Sohm with a new four-blade prop that brought the boat to life. It now accelerated briskly and ran 37 mph—Goofy got dialed in at Lake X.

Sohm returned to the pontoon shootout in 1999 with a new boat fitted with a clear plastic window in the deck so that passengers could see his invention, now called T.A.P. Fin System by Conrad Marine

PHOTOS: TOM KING



GOOD SHIP AND TRUE Intrepid pontoonists pass by Pierhead Front Lighthouse exiting the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal, outbound for Frankfort, Michigan. The Bentley pontoon with T.A.P. fins and Mercury Pro XS 250 proved capable.

Inc., at work with the boat underway. Sohm also invested $150,000 to get the invention patented. A boat equipped with T.A.P. fins rode higher in the water and offered a smoother ride, improved economy, and higher top speed. The fins also helped the boat carve through turns rather than skidding in typical pontoon fashion. According to Sohm, boatbuilder Godfrey thought his was a brilliant solution. So they copied it. Sohm sued, and in a settlement reached in 2003, Godfrey agreed to pay a royalty for each set of T.A.P.-like fins it installed. After Godfrey became part of Nautic Global Group in 2005, that deal ended. Pontoon manufacturers began placing lifting strakes on the bottom of pontoon tubes, and then on the sides. Sohm says that these devices improve performance, but the patented feature of the T.A.P. system is the 90-degree bend, which he says simply performs better than any other solution.

MAKER Sohm aboard his original custom-built pontoon on the Fox River in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. This boat was the test-bed vessel for the T.A.P. fin prototype.

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) TOM KING, COURTESY BRADY KAY

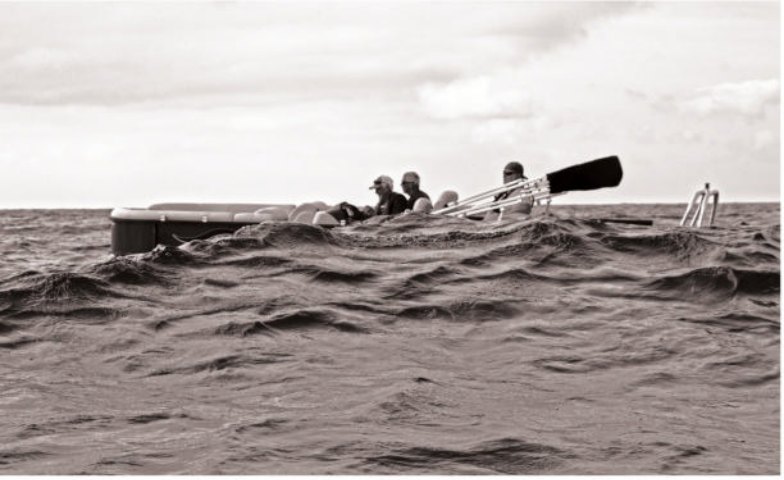
Anxious to turn his invention into a profitable business, Sohm began selling T.A.P. fins in kit form, to be welded to a customer's boat. He continued to pitch his invention to pontoon builders, hoping to either license or sell the patent outright. Time after time, Sohm says he ran into a "not invented here" attitude.

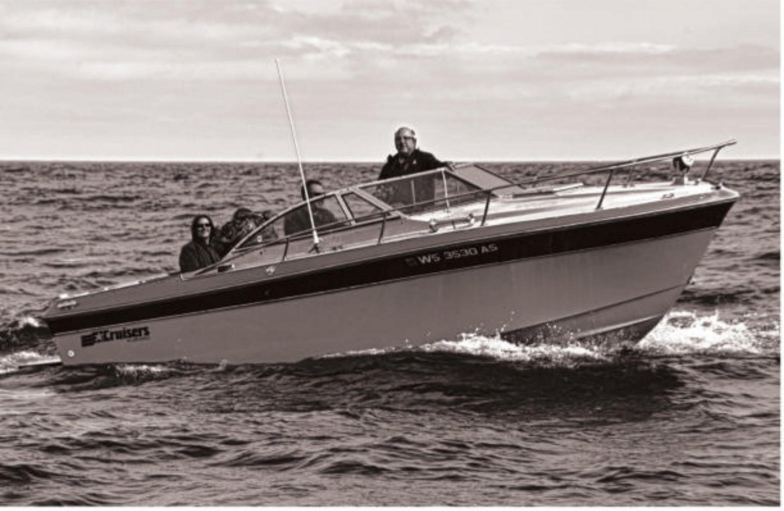
"The engineers at these companies don't want to admit that a device created by a guy from Oshkosh named Goofy, with no degree, works better than what they've got," Sohm said. "Or they just don't see the value. What they have is good enough."

Sohm decided that he needed some publicity to help promote his business, and one evening came up with the beer-fueled notion of crossing Lake Michigan, the biggest handy body of water.

"Sturgeon Bay to Frankfort is 87 miles, the shortest distance across the lake," Sohm said. "My big boat had a 200 Mercury and a 24-gallon fuel tank. We added another 32-gallon tank on the deck, but I still had to carry 36 more gallons in plastic jugs. That motor was a guzzler."

His boat had no GPS and not even a compass, so he enlisted his speedboat buddy Terry Kaiser to lead the way in a 34 Formula.





SWELL RIDE Swells rose higher than the pontoon fence in the middle of the lake, but the triple-tube Bentley stayed on top of the water (top). The crew in our Cruisers Inc. (now Cruisers Yachts) chase boat reported a much rougher ride (above).

"Those guys were out all night and sick over the rail, and got us off course," Sohm said. "We missed Frankfort by 20 miles, and I almost ran out of gas, but we made it over and back. I took a few waves over the bow, so it was just a little sketchy."

Sohm says that at the time, the media wouldn't write about his accomplishment because it seemed so risky, they feared being held liable if readers attempted to repeat the feat and died trying. So much for publicity.

CROSSING THE LAKE

Flash-forward 25 years, and Sohm is still pitching his patent and still selling his kits at boat shows—thousands of pontoons are running with owner-installed T.A.P. fins. He and Terry moved to North Carolina in 2003 to be closer to her family, and he works as a gofer at Long Island Marina in Catawba, North Carolina. Summer 2024 saw the confluence of the Oshkosh Toon-Fest poker run, the 50th anniversary reunion of the Oshkosh West class of 1974, and the 25th anniversary of the original pontoon crossing. What a weekend. Sohm insisted that *Pontoon and Deck Boat* editor Brady Kay and I join him on the anniversary crossing. Sohm towed up from North Carolina his personal 22-foot Bentley triple-tube pontoon, powered by a fuel-sipping Mercury FourStroke 250 and equipped with a compass and a GPS. For a chase/photo boat, I enlisted ace technician Dan Jansen to join us in *Cheap and Easy*, his 1983 Cruisers 220 Baron. We equipped ourselves with water, some snacks, handheld VHF radios, a spare prop, fuel filters and some tools.

The weather on July 15, our planned day of crossing, looked grim—thunderstorms and big seas—but a massive high-pressure dome was cruising in from Canada and would give us promising conditions the next day. We motored out of the Sturgeon Bay ship canal on July 16 under clear skies. Once we were a few miles out, we settled in, cruising at 20 mph. Seas were 3 to 4 feet and confused, with a chop on the top and wind from the northeast. The farther east we went, the rougher it got; we were catching the back side of the previous day's weather. As high pressure approached, the wind shifted to the north, so we were rolling in a beam sea, with the tops of waves appearing higher than the pontoon rails. With triple-tube buoyancy and the T.A.P. fins, we stayed on top of the water, and while we smacked down hard a few times, we stayed dry and in control. For the last 20 miles, we reduced our speed to about 15 mph, but we were still outpacing the Cruisers. When I looked back, I could see mostly the bottom of the runabout as it bucked through the waves. Dan brought two curious buddies along; they and photographer Tom King took a beating.

The shoreline bluffs and Frankfort light appeared on the horizon about four hours after our departure, and we motored past the breakwater and into Betsie Lake. At the gas dock, we pumped 25 gallons into the pontoon and 31 into the Cruisers. The pontoon got about 3.5 mpg. Consider that in 1999 it took almost 90 gallons to make the same distance plus 20 off-course miles. Our fuel economy was about three times better in 2024. And the ride was much less dramatic, thanks mostly to that

For an adventure ride like this one, that third tube is a game-changer and, along with the advent of force-capturing devices like T.A.P. fins, might be the most significant advance in pontoon evolution over the past 25 years.

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) TOM KING (2)

AN ADVENTUROUS DAY ON THE WATER Pick your day, be prepared, and you could pilot a pontoon almost anywhere and still be smiling. Sohm is at the helm, with the author riding shotgun. What could go wrong?

third tube under the boat. For an adventure ride like this one, that third tube is a game-changer and, along with the advent of force-capturing devices like T.A.P. fins, might be the most significant advance in pontoon evolution over the past 25 years.

Our original plan was to grab some brunch after we arrived on the west coast of Michigan, then head back. There was no brunch at Jacobson Marina, however, and we didn't want to walk into town, so we settled for a few bags of chips. And then we shoved off on a due-west course back to America's Dairyland. By now the lake had really laid down, and we were cruising along at 25 mph.

Lake Michigan is a big expanse of water, but I was still surprised that during the entire trip, we spotted just two other boats—a very high-masted sailboat and a lake freighter—both far off in the distance. At one point on the return, in the middle of the lake, we stopped and shut off the outboard. The sky was perfectly clear, and the lake was a deep cobalt blue. For 360 degrees around us, there was nothing to see but blue sky and blue water. It was beautiful and also just a little unsettling for someone who is rarely out of sight of land. I realized for the first time that if something went wrong, we were truly alone—no radio contact with our little handhelds, no other boats around, no cell service. The piece of gear we didn't have was a tracker, satellite messenger or a satellite phone. We did have our float plan logged with Terry waiting back in Sturgeon Bay, and we had checked in from Michigan. We were well-stocked with food, and if we ran out of water, well, you could drink Lake Michigan.

The return run took just three hours. I wish I had more drama to share, but in the end, this was just a long ride on a pontoon. Funny that since then, when I tell people that I crossed the lake on a pontoon, the response is universal: What a goofy thing to do! Exactly.

GOOF TROOP Sohm handed out commemorative T-shirts celebrating the 25th anniversary of his original Lake Michigan crossing aboard a pontoon boat.

PHOTO: (FROM TOP) COURTESY BRADY KAY; TOM KING

MH

MOTORHEAD

By
Charles Plueddeman

ONE AND DONE! Single-engine boats, especially lighter, shallower types such as RIBs and pontoons, will benefit from joystick maneuverability.

MERCURY JOYSTICK STEERING FOR SINGLE-ENGINE VESSELS

Another tool in the single-engine boat owner's docking box.

The new Mercury Marine joystick control for a single outboard puts throttle, shifting and steering control in the palm of your hand. Many captains will find that the joystick makes it easier to handle a single-engine boat in tight quarters. Full-lock steering response is realized with a quick turn of the joystick rather than with multiple turns of the wheel, and shifting from forward to reverse is just as quick. The joystick simplifies boathandling, matching the functionality of the Yamaha Helm Master EX single-engine system introduced in 2021.

We tested the single-engine joystick aboard a Highfield Sport 700 RIB powered by a Mercury Verado 250 outboard. A lightweight RIB is easily pushed around by wind and current, and thus is a perfect application for the joystick. The same could be said for a pontoon. Tilt the knob forward or back for forward or reverse thrust, and twist it left or right to steer the outboard. The bow of the vessel always follows the direction of the joystick rotation, whether forward or reverse thrust is selected. The joystick is proportional, which means that the farther from the center the joystick is moved, the more thrust is applied. The system is programmed to limit thrust through the joystick, which makes it less likely you'll dial up too much thrust—we've all seen that happen around the dock.

Learning to use this control takes some practice. Experienced captains will instinctively reach for the wheel. But once you develop new muscle memory, control becomes instinctive. This joystick also offers some autopilot functions if the boat is rigged with a compatible MFD and a Mercury GPS/IMU. The single-engine joystick is compatible only with Mercury Verado and Sea Pro V-8, V-10 and V-12 engine models equipped with Mercury electric power steering. It can be retrofit, but our Merc rep suggests that the ideal time for installation is during a repower, when all the required components can be ordered together. Vessels equipped with electric steering can add the single-engine joystick for about $2,500, and autopilot for an additional $3,000. Note that these features are not mutually exclusive. If the vessel has electric steering, AutoPilot can be installed without the joystick, and vice versa.

SMARTCRAFT OS JOYSTICK UPDATE AVAILABLE Mercury Marine recently released a SmartCraft software update that gives multiengine joystick piloting new capabilities. Closed-loop velocity control will automatically adjust throttle and steering if wind or current causes the boat to drift off course during joystick maneuvers, reducing unwanted fore-aft drifting by up to 74 percent. Speed-based joystick operation replaces the previous rpm-based system. The joystick input translates to actual speed over ground, and if the boat encounters a force such as a headwind or tailwind, the system will automatically increase or decrease throttle to maintain the captain's desired speed. For V-12 engines, the software update enables slip control, which allows the transmission to slip up to 90 percent to reduce propeller rpm and more accurately control the boat's movements. The software update is available for boats that currently have multiengine joystick piloting and next-gen digital throttle and shift controls. See a Mercury dealer for details.

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY HIGHFIELD BOATS, COURTESY MERCURY MARINE

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LIPPERT™

By Jim Hendricks

HUMMINBIRD
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HUMMINBIRD MEGA LIVE 2 AND XPLORE MFDs

As forward-facing sonar, aka live sonar, from brands such as Garmin and Lowrance takes over freshwater bass fishing, some anglers forget that the company that introduced this technology was Humminbird. Now Humminbird has stepped up its game with a new generation of FFS—Mega Live 2—along with a new series of compatible multifunction displays.

Mega Live 2 features enhanced clarity and a more stable view versus the previous Humminbird forward-facing-sonar system. It offers improved real-time lure tracking, enhanced target separation, and optimized color choices. You can call up any one of 15 vibrant color palettes, each designed to improve visibility in varying water and light conditions.

"With Mega Live 2, Humminbird's live-imaging technology now exceeds angler expectations, delivering the clarity, detail, bait tracking, and target separation needed to make the most of every cast," says Braeden Harris, Humminbird brand manager.

Mega Live 2 offers three viewing modes—Down, Forward, and Landscape—to allow anglers to scan different areas around the boat. The TargetBoost function in Mega Live 2 boosts brightness and contrast, making suspended fish and bait stand out more clearly in open water. Mega Live 2 sonar operates on a single frequency in the 1 MHz range, and is compatible with Humminbird's Apex, Solis G3 and the latest series, Xplore.

Boasting the best features of Humminbird's Helix series, the new Xplore series of MFDs integrates seamlessly with Mega Live 2. Xplore displays feature a simpler user interface, Cross Touch control, improved waypoint management, and built-in Lakemaster and Coastmaster with mapping of 13,000 US and Canadian lakes, 170 million acres of coastal waters, and SmartStrike for real-time fish activity predictions.

A powerful quad-core processor and customizable side buttons allow anglers to quickly access critical features. Available in 9-, 10- and 12-inch models, Xplore integrates with the One-Boat Network for control of systems such as compatible Minn Kota trolling motors, as well as Mega Live 2. Xplore starts at $1,299.99; Mega Live 2 sonar starts at $1,499.99; humminbird.johnsonoutdoors.com

PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY HUMMINBIRD, COURTESY SI-TEX / KODEN

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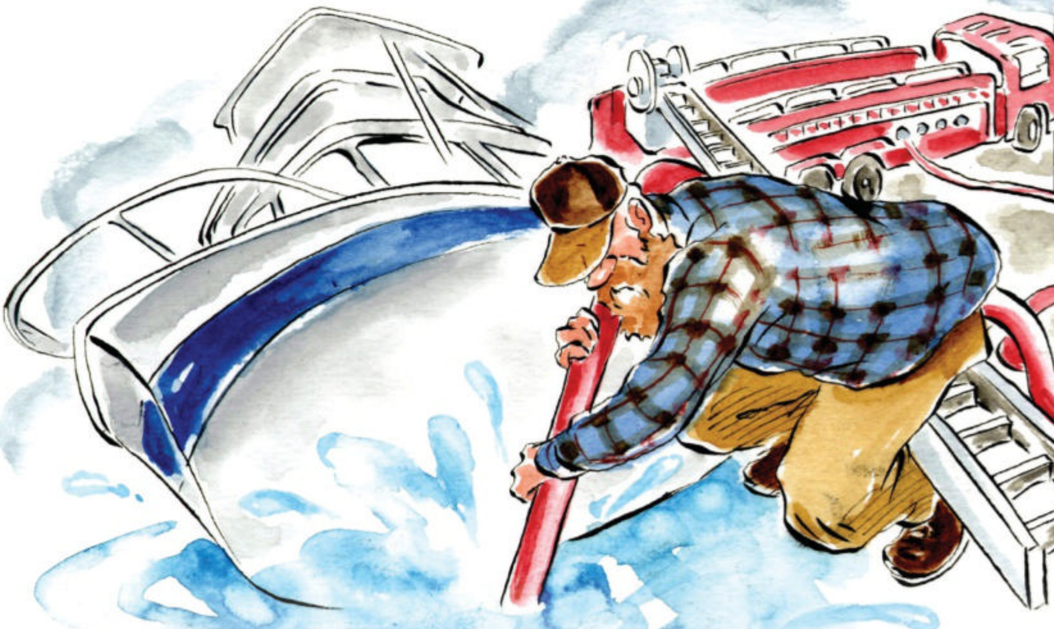
OFF MY DOCK

By Charles Plueddeman



FINDERS KEEPERS?

Solving boating mysteries from inside the Lake View.

Our neighborhood made the boating news twice in 2024, stories that have fueled the offseason hot-stove league here at the Lake View Inn, where everyone is welcome to their opinion. I'm almost certain you heard about Ryan Borgwardt, the fellow who tried to stage his drowning in Big Green Lake this past August. I got calls and texts from all over the country on this one.

Borgwardt flips his kayak into the lake, leaving behind ID and a tackle box, and then paddles a little tube to shore, where he has stashed an e-bike, which he rides 60 miles to Madison, where he catches a bus to Michigan, crosses into Canada, then catches a flight to meet a woman in Georgia. The Republic of, not the state. But for a month, everyone thought the poor guy had drowned in the state's deepest lake. Everyone, of course, except my good friend Chuck Larson, who has watched many episodes of *Unsolved Mysteries*, and immediately smelled a rat.

"Using my Spock logic, I deduce this is a ruse," Chuck said after a week of high-tech searching had not located a corpse. "Nobody fishes Big Green from a kayak, especially that side of the lake. The wake reverb off the sandstone bluff makes it too rough. And the water is 260 feet deep. Was he trolling for lake trout from a kayak? I don't think so. Finally, they found his life jacket. Have you ever seen a kayaker not wearing a life jacket? My next call would be to check his passport records."

Borgwardt had requested a replacement passport and left one on his dresser at home, so the county sheriff didn't check passport records for a month. Once it was revealed that he had used the replacement to cross into Canada, the jig was up. And $40,000 had been invested looking for his waterlogged body. Borgwardt voluntarily returned to Wisconsin in December. His wife is reportedly pissed.

We are also still discussing the matter of *Deep Thought* (oh, the irony), a 33-foot Chris-Craft Roamer that has been beached on the Lake Michigan shore near Milwaukee since October 18. The story goes that the new owners purchased the boat in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and intended to cruise it home to Mississippi. Except they ran out of gas. The boat drifted onto the sandy shore just south of Bradford Beach, and the owner has apparently not been seen since. After determining that the boat did not pose a hazard to navigation or the environment, the Coast Guard declined to get involved. Turns out, Wisconsin does not have a formal program to address abandoned vessels, and no statute requiring removal if said vessel does not impede navigation. So, there it sits. The boat has become a tourist attraction, with a Google Maps pin. It was decorated with a pine garland for the holidays and tagged with graffiti and an "I Closed Wolski's" sticker. A commercial towing and salvage company made two failed attempts to pull the boat off the beach, but its running gear is reportedly 4 feet deep in sand, and the engine room is filled with water. Or now, probably ice.

> The boat has become a tourist attraction, with a Google Maps pin. It was decorated with a pine garland for the holidays and tagged with graffiti and an "I Closed Wolski's" sticker.

Chuck is working on a scheme to salvage this vessel, using a fire truck to pump high-pressure water under the hull and wash away the sand. So, let us know if you spot a pumper truck for sale. Chuck intends to rename the Roamer *Finders Keepers*.

ILLUSTRATION: TIM BOWER; PHOTO: MABEL PLUEDDEMAN

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